

The Love You Had At First

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. My name is Sean. For those of you who don't know me, I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church. And it is my joy and a privilege to be able to preach God's Word to you on a regular basis.

This morning, our passage is from Revelation chapter 2. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring a copy of it for you to use while you're here. You could actually take that home with you to use. It's a wonderful passage, and I believe God has something to say to us from this passage.

So let me pray and ask for his help. Heavenly Father, we know that you and your son Jesus, who is the Lord over this church, you carry a far deeper burden for this local church than I can fathom, even as a pastor.

And we are desirous of you communicating that to us this morning. Amen. So address us from your Word.

Reveal to us your heart, your will for us. Challenge us, convict us, comfort us, and build us up that we might be a faithful church who perseveres in faith and hope and love until the very end.

[1 : 57] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are willing and able, please stand with me as I read the passage of Revelation 2, verses 1 to 7.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

[3 : 18] Yet this you have. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

You may be seated. I don't normally follow celebrity news, but I read a New York Times article this past week that said that 2023 has been the year of celebrity split with dozens of notable actors, singers, and reality stars, and one former mayor of New York announcing a breakup and separation or divorce.

I think people like... I feel like a fraud mentioning these names because I haven't really listened to any of these things, but Ariana Grande, Taylor Swift, Britney Spears.

I know Britney Spears from when I was younger. Reese Witherspoon, Hugh Jackman, among others. Apparently, they all broke up this year. And the author notes that sometimes these breakup announcements are so relentlessly and aggressively optimistic and positive that it's like it could feel very forced.

[4 : 52] But no matter how much, you know, PR spin you put on these breakups, the long and short of it all is that they're not lovers anymore. The love that they had for another has faded.

The ones so glowingly happy, good-looking, madly in love couple has become... they have become estranged from one another. How does that happen?

The same thing can happen to Christians and to churches in their relationship with God. Let me ask you, do you love Jesus more today than you did at first?

In chapters 2 to 3, we see Jesus personally addressing the seven churches in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and we're listed in chapter 1, verse 11.

And our passage this morning is Jesus addressing the church in Ephesus. And his evaluation of that church is that while they have been enduring patiently, they have abandoned the love they had at first.

[6 : 07] I'll unpack what that means more later on, but the Ephesian church, as we'll see, was a hard-working and theologically discerning and persevering and gritty church.

But their love for God had grown cold. So the main point this morning that I want to drive home is that we must recover the love we had at first and shine God's light from our lampstand.

For an outline, I'm going to address, to follow the structure that these addresses take, these seven letters to the churches, because each address has the same general structure. Do I have the other one?

There you go. Yeah. The recipient, which at first, it mentions who the recipient is, and it always takes the form of to the angel of the church in blank. And this one is in Ephesus.

Second, the author is identified. It's Jesus. But Jesus is described differently in each passage. It begins with, thus says the one, or these are the words of the one. And then it takes a description of Jesus, a snippet from the glorious vision we saw earlier in Revelation 1.

[7 : 15] And it uses a part of that vision that most directly pertains to the current situation of that church that is being addressed. So for example, to the church in Smyrna that's facing persecution, intense persecution, and need to be faithful unto death, that's their need, Jesus identifies himself to them as the one who died and came back to life.

To the church in Pergamum that is believing in false teaching, Jesus identifies himself as the one who has a sharp two-edged sword, the sword of his word, the word of his mouth with which he discerns truth and makes war against those who deny his word.

And to the church in Thyatira that's tolerating idolatry and sexual immorality, Jesus identifies himself as the one who has eyes like a flame of fire to discern and to judge and whose feet are like burnished bronze with which he strikes down the wicked.

And so keep in mind this pattern that the description of Jesus that we see in the beginning is going to be relevant related to the situation that the church is facing as we go. And third, after the recipient and the author, we see the evaluation of the church by Jesus.

And this section begins with the phrase, I know your dot, dot, dot. Usually it's, I know your works. Jesus goes on to describe their good works if they have them as well as their bad works if they have them.

[8 : 38] And two churches in the series, the Smyrna and Philadelphia, hear only commendations because they are faithful churches. While one church in Laodicea hears only corrections because they've been unfaithful.

Most churches are a mixture of commendation and correction in their evaluation. Fourth, there is an exhortation, what Christ is commanding them to do in light of his preceding evaluation.

And that varies with each letter. And then fifth, there is an invitation to heed what Jesus has just said. And this section is identical in all of the letters. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And then finally, sixth, there is the promise of reward to those who obey. And this section begins with the phrase, the one who conquers, dot, dot, dot. The one who conquers is offered some variation of salvation, of eternal life and fellowship with God.

And sometimes those last two sections, the invitation, the promise are flipped in order. And these letters, each of them, in a way, is like a microcosm. It's like an embryonic form mirrors the entire book because it harkens back to chapter one, the glorious vision of Christ.

[9 : 52] And then it points forward to the end, the last three chapters of Revelation where the conquerors, those who conquer are rewarded. And it also contains the struggles of the church and the persecution, the suffering, the temptations that the body of Revelation deals with.

So that's the general structure. First, let's look at the recipient in verse one. To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write. The recipient is the angelic representative of the church in Ephesus.

As I mentioned last week, all of the messages are directed to the angel that represents that particular church before God. And that means every true church on earth has a representative in heaven.

It's easy for us to lose sight of this amazing reality because when we look at the churches around us and when we look at even our own church and how weak we are, how flawed we are, and how sinful we are, the church can seem so earthly.

But the church is not a mere earthly institution. It is an eternal, heavenly institution. This is why Christians should never make light of or be dismissive of the church.

[11 : 07] All earthly associations and institutions will fade away. Schools, Harvard, MIT, Boston University, Cornell, they'll all fade away. Companies, HubSpot, EF, Amazon, Google, they will all fade away.

The United States of America, China, Russia, they will all fade away. They will all fade away when the earth as we know it passes away, which will certainly happen because the Bible says so.

But the church, which is the gathered people of God, is a heavenly reality. It's an eternal reality. And therefore, it will endure.

This should be a stark warning to those who would persecute the church or harm the church because they'll have to answer to God himself because our angelic representatives are there before God.

This particular section of Revelation 2 is addressed to Ephesus. And I'm going to give you a brief historical sketch of the city because it's helpful for understanding the context, what's going on.

[12 : 12] Ephesus was a prominent metropolis and it served as the provincial capital of Asia Minor, which I mentioned earlier is modern-day Turkey. And because of its location at the mouth of the Kaster River, it was the commercial center of the region and the administrative center of the region.

And it was most famous for its temple of Artemis, the Greek god named Artemis or Diana, the Romans called them. And the worship of Artemis was not only the religious center but the economical center of that city as we saw when we were in the book of Acts.

This temple was huge. It's like, it's bigger than a football field, twice the size of the Parthenon, which some of you guys may have seen. In Acts 18, 18-22, Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila to stay behind and minister in Ephesus.

They may have been the founders of the church in Ephesus. And they, along with Apollos, they preach the gospel there. And later, Paul himself comes to minister to the Ephesian church for three years, during which time he says he faced many adversaries and one time he has to move locations because he's so intensely being opposed in Acts 19.

Later in his life, Paul sends his disciple and purdage, Timothy, to Ephesus to minister and he charges him in 1 Timothy 1-3 to remain at Ephesus so that he may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrines.

[13 : 41] So it seems that the fight for doctrinal fidelity that we see here in Revelation and they've been doing well in that, it continues in the later years. Then after that, we see from 2 Timothy that Onesiphorus and Tychicus also minister to Ephesian church so they've had a string of godly pastors teaching them, helping them.

And according to 3rd century AD Greek pastor and historian Eusebius, after Apostle John was released from his exile in Patmos because Emperor Domitian died, John himself went to Ephesus and pastored there and lived there.

And so this is the group, the church group of believers that he's writing to. So that's the recipient. And then in the second half of verse 1, we're told who the author of the letter is, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

The phrase, the words of him, can be more literally translated as these things says he, or thus says he, thus says the one.

It's the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew phrase that the prophets used again and again hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Thus says the Lord. So Jesus is here asserting his divine authority and addressing his churches and the angelic representatives of his churches.

[15 : 09] When Jesus speaks, the Lord God speaks. He is the ancient of days, the almighty. Human beings often make errors in judgment and errors in speech.

But the following evaluations and exhortations of these seven churches by Jesus is not human, merely. It is divine. It's completely accurate and therefore needs to be obeyed completely.

As I mentioned earlier, the description of Jesus here alludes back to the vision from chapter 1 of Jesus. And there he explained in verse 20, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

And this particular snippet of that glorious vision is being used because it relates to the situation that the Ephesus church was in. And because they were neglecting the most important thing of loving God and loving one another, they had abandoned the love that they had first.

And so this omission was so significant, they're at the risk of basically being de-churched, ceasing to exist as a church. And so with the threat of moving the lampstand, Jesus reminds them, I am the sovereign one who holds the seven stars, the seven angels who represent those seven lampstands in my right hand.

[16 : 35] when you, the right hand is usually the image that people use of strength and control because most people in the world are right-handed.

That's their dominant hand. So when you want to really grab something securely, you use your right hand, not your weak hand. And so Jesus says, I have the whole of the churches and those angels will represent them in his right hand.

That's his cosmic authority and his total sovereignty over these churches. And not only that, he's reminding them that he cares for these churches.

He's the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands. Jesus is not off his own world, uninterested in the going-ons in Ephesus. Jesus is intimately involved.

He's connected and he's caring for the believers in the church in Ephesus. So that's why he's identifying himself in this way. He's telling them, I am the light of the world. You are my lampstands.

[17 : 32] You're the setting that's supposed to support my light, that I'm supposed to broadcast through the world. And so return to your love and walk with me as my lampstand.

That's Jesus' exhortation to them. After identifying himself, Jesus pronounces his evaluation of the church. He begins with commendations in verses two to three. I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary. Jesus repeats that phrase twice. I know.

It's like he's embracing us and then patting us on the back and then just nodding knowingly as he peers into our eyes. I know.

And Jesus will say this over and over again throughout chapters two and three. He knows all our good works. He knows all our bad works. He always knows. But in our passage today, it's connected to his commendations.

[18 : 50] I know your works. brothers and sisters, do you ever feel like your love, your toil for the Lord never gets noticed?

Do you feel alone sometimes in standing up against evil? Has your endurance been tested living in this sinful and broken world that's full of temptations and setbacks?

Have you been ridiculed for your faith in the Lord Jesus? Jesus says, I know. I know. I know what you have been through.

I know how much you have suffered. I know what you have endured for my name's sake. And there's a play on words here. Jesus commends the church in Ephesus saying you cannot bear with those who are evil.

But then he says again, you are bearing up for my name's sake. So, they don't put up with evildoers.

[20 : 02] They don't bear them at all. But they have borne much for the sake of Jesus' name. It's an amazing commendation. That's something we should aspire to as a church. Jesus also specifically praises them for how they cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

It's a pretty strong statement, right? They cannot bear with those who are evil. There are churches nowadays that condone all manners of sin within the body of Christ in the name of tolerance.

But tolerance for evil is not a virtue. Condoning what God's word condemns is not compassion. It's compromise.

I'm not saying that we should separate ourselves completely from the world, from the evildoers, because then we'd have to leave the world. But as 1 Corinthians 5 tells us, it is our responsibility to judge those who are inside the church, to make sure that the church remains holy, make sure that there's no unrepentant sin in our midst.

sin adulterates our worship and damages our fellowship and it discredits our witness to the world.

[21 : 22] Therefore, sin must be purged from our midst. And of course, I'm not saying that Christians never sin, we do. But I am saying that true Christians always repent of their sin.

They acknowledge it, they confess it, they try to turn away from it. And for those who do repent, there's always mercy.

Even for those who have committed the most heinous sins that even our sinful world will not tolerate, there's mercy if you repent. However, the church must not tolerate unrepentant sinners.

Can verse 2 be said of our church? Will Jesus commend us in this way, saying you cannot bear with those who are evil? More specifically, Jesus says, they have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

You may remember from Acts 20 when Paul is addressing the elders in the church in Ephesus, he warns them specifically, predicting that the fierce wolves, false teachers will come in among them and try to lead them astray.

[22 : 30] And that prediction came true. False apostles did come to the church in Ephesus. By apostle, they're probably not trying to claim to be one of the twelve apostles because that's a very clearly defined and well-known and closed group of people.

So that would not have flown. But they're probably claiming to be either the second tier apostles, those who have witnessed the risen Jesus and were commissioned to proclaim the gospel and lead the foundation for the church, or maybe even a third tier apostle who are basically just generic messengers sent up by local churches to other local churches to provide aid or to convey some message or some decision or teaching that was made.

And it could be used in all those senses throughout the New Testament. And there were benefits to claiming to be an apostle because it was lucrative.

If you claim to be an apostle, you automatically get free room and board from the church that you are a part of and trying to convey the message to. And also, it brought prestige. People listen to you. They let you talk.

And so, there were people doing this and we have evidences in scripture itself and from other documents in history that there were false apostles as there are today.

[23 : 47] And the Ephesian church knew how to discern that. They had theological discernment. They were able to separate them out and they didn't listen to the false apostles which we also must do.

We can see their discernment also in verse 6 after his criticism of the church in verses 45. He brings another commendation saying, Yet this you have. You hate the work of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.

As we'll see later in this chapter, the teaching of the Nicolaitans in the New Testament was akin to the teaching of Balaam in the Old Testament. And essentially, they put a stumbling block in front of the believers saying that they could eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

So it was a permissive heretical teaching. They were saying, Jesus has freed you from your sins. You can go participate in that idol sacrifice.

That's okay. You know that those idols are nothing. Go. Enjoy your freedom in Christ. Go have those relationships. Go have those sexual relationships with people.

[24 : 54] God has freed you. He's forgiven you of your sin. Who cares what we do with our bodies anyway? Be free. That was the message of the Nicolaitans. And Jesus says here, I hate the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

Pretty strong words. Jesus hates false teaching because it profanes the glory and holiness of God and incubates sin which when fully grown causes death to those whom he loves.

if we want to hear this commendation from Christ then we also need to hate what God hates.

But Jesus' evaluation of the church doesn't end with those commendations. He also brings a devastating critique in verse 4. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

It's heart-wrenching. Jesus is telling them, you don't love me like you used to. This kind of correction has Old Testament precedent in Jeremiah 2.2 when it says, thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love, as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown.

[26 : 23] Israel was once so devoted to the Lord that they were willing to follow him everywhere even to a wilderness where you cannot sow seeds, where there would be no food. They were saying, I will go.

Wherever you go, through fire and through water, I will go. That was their devotion of youth but they had long forsaken that. That's Jeremiah's indictment and this is mirroring that.

Do you remember the devotion of your youth, the love you had at first? I got my first cell phone when I went to college and I probably spent on average about 30 minutes on calls like every two weeks or so.

I didn't use the phone very much. That was the case until my junior year in college when I met a woman named Hannah who's now my wife.

I started spending three hours a day on the phone and then my mom called me at the end of the month asking me about the exorbitant overage charges on our family cell phone plan and that's how they learned that I was interested in a woman.

[27 : 42] That's what my love for Hannah was like at first. It was consuming. Do you remember the love you had for Jesus at first?

Do you remember how you used to devour the scriptures? Do you remember how zealous you used to be to tell people about Jesus and what you have found in Jesus do you remember the passion and feeling with which you used to sing praises to him and pray to him?

Do you remember the abandon with which you said to him here I am send me I will go wherever you tell me to go. I think we can be like the church in Ephesus in many ways.

We're in a cosmopolitan hub surrounded by idolatries and heresies and by and large we are a theologically sound and theologically discerning church. We know how to spot false teachers.

We're also full of gritty hardworking people you guys are doers and go-getters. We're toiling for the Lord with patient endurance but do we love Jesus like we did at first?

[29 : 14] I think sometimes we can chalk this up to misguided youthful exuberance. Say oh I was immature and legalistic back then. I had zeal without knowledge back then but now that I have grown in knowledge my zeal is more tempered.

But the Bible's solution to zeal without knowledge is not knowledge without zeal. It's zeal with knowledge. Could it be that we have abandoned the love we had at first?

the church in Ephesus was like a wife who cooks for her husband who sleeps on the same bed as her husband raises the kids with her husband and wears the wedding ring that her husband gave her but who has lost her love for her husband.

She's a dutiful wife but not a devoted wife. The church in Ephesus was like that. They were dutifully going through the motions but their devotion to the Lord had waned.

They had abandoned the love they had at first. I want us to sit with that for a little bit but I do want to qualify it because I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying and you can hear that.

[30 : 39] I'm not saying look at the Ephesian church. Oh, all that doctrinal stuff is unimportant. Just focus on love. All you need is love. I am not saying that because Jesus doesn't say that in this passage.

As human beings we gravitate toward these either/or scenarios. The psychologists call false dilemma fallacy. We tend to think of things as either/or even when they are not mutually exclusive.

We must not pit theological fidelity against Christian love. Jesus commands the church in Ephesus for their doctrinal fidelity.

Theological accuracy is important. Obedience even to the minutia of the law is important. Matthew 5, 17-19, Jesus says that he didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill them and he says that not an iota, that's one of the smallest letters in the Greek alphabet, or not a dot, or that would probably be Hebrew, will pass away from the scriptures until heaven and earth pass away.

He warns us, therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[32 : 04] So no, Jesus is not downplaying theological faithfulness. Scripture never makes light of obedience. Even in Matthew 23 when Jesus is criticizing the Pharisees for fastidiously tithing the smallest herbs, giving a tenth of the smallest herbs of their produce to God, tithing mint and dill and cumin.

But while they were doing that, they were neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. And so Jesus rebukes them. But even as he's rebuking them, Jesus never tells them not to worry about tithing the mint and the dill and the cumin.

No, he says instead, these you ought to have done without neglecting the others. The Pharisees were legalistic and hypocritical not because they obeyed the least of these commandments, but because they obeyed the least of these commandments while neglecting and disobeying the greater commandments.

the solution is not just obey these things and neglect the rest. The solution is obedience to all of the commands from the least to the greatest.

With that qualification aside, I want to return to the main exhortation of this passage because some commands are greater than others. What is the greatest commandment for us as Christians?

[33 : 36] Jesus once answered that question directly in Matthew 22, 37 to 39. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Sometimes pastors and theologians debate the phrase abandoning the love you had at first.

What does that mean? Is it love for God? Is it love for the church, one another? Or is it love for your neighbors? I think the answer is all of the above. Because Jesus connects those two loves when he gives the greatest commandment.

Love for God, love for one another, love for our neighbors. And all that we do as Christians are supposed to be done in love. In 1 John 4, 20-21, it tells us that we cannot love God while hating our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So love for God and love for one another also go hand in hand. So if you're neglecting one, you're neglecting them all. The love for God is the foundation, the fountain from which all our other loves for one another and for our neighbors flow.

[34 : 53] 1 Corinthians 13 says this, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. And at the end of that chapter he says, so now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Love is the greatest command. I want all of us to speak in the tongues of angels. I want all of us to have prophetic powers. I want all of us to understand all mysteries and knowledge.

I want all of us to have faith that can move mountains. And I want all of us to be radically generous and sacrificial in our giving. I want all of us to be willing to lay down our lives for Christ and even go through fire for him.

[36 : 03] But all of these things are meaningless if we have not love. Most of you have probably heard me quote this at least once. C.S. Lewis puts it this way, a perfect man would never act from the sense of duty.

He would always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love of God and of other people like a crutch which is a substitute for a leg.

Most of us need the crutch at times but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs, our own loves, tastes, habits, etc. can do the journey on their own. Brothers and sisters, God wants more than our dutiful obedience.

Yes, He wants your toil and He wants your patient endurance but He's also for your joy. He's also for your love.

If you think that God merely wants you for the services and ministries that you can perform on His behalf, then you are badly mistaken. God wants to draw you into a loving relationship with Him.

[37 : 14] He wants you to share in His everlasting love for you and for you to love Him in return. He wants you to be forever enveloped by the triune love of God.

So yes, let's be patiently enduring Christians but let's also be joyfully exuberant Christians. Let's be hardworking Christians but let's also be deeply loving Christians.

Notice also the contrast between love and hate in this passage. The church in Ephesus hate the works of the Nicolaitans which Jesus also hates. That's a good thing. To hate what God hates is good.

But their failure was in the absence of love. They didn't love what Jesus loved. They abandoned the love they had at first. It's not enough to hate what is false and evil.

We also must love God and love one another and love our neighbors. sometimes Christians get caricatured in the media as people who are only against this and against that.

[38 : 23] Most of the time it's not fair but for some Christians that caricature hits a little too close to home. Again it's good to hate what God hates and to be against what God is against but if you're only an against this and against that Christian and not for this love Christian for that love Christian then there is an imbalance.

So now let's return to the exhortation verse 5 that we've seen the evaluation and we go to the exhortation in verse 5. Remember therefore from where you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first.

If not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. I think this exhortation has a particular emphasis on loving God in the way we witness to others.

You're going to ask me where you're getting that in the text I'm going to show you. There's three R's here to help we summarize. Remember repent and then if you don't you're going to be removed to remove the lampstand from its place.

The church in Ephesus needs to repent of abandoning their first love and that's going to be seen in doing the works they did at first. So there's something that they're not doing and that's an evidence that they abandoned their first love.

[39 : 41] So what are these works? I think those works are connected to the recurring image of the lampstand. A lampstand is supposed to be a stand for the lamp. It's supposed to give light and Jesus himself is the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Jesus is making sure that the light of the gospel does not go out from these churches. And so the fitting judgment for a church that does not shine its light is to remove the lampstand from its place.

As Jesus said in Matthew 5, 14-16, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden nor do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl or a basket. Instead they put it on its stand so that it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way let your light shine before men so that they might see your good works and praise your Father in heaven. The recovery of the first love for the church in Ephesus will have been evidenced in the works that they did at first in giving glory to God and shining the light of Jesus Christ.

I think that connection between first love and bearing witness 4, 9-14 where Jesus prophesies that Christians will face tribulation and persecution and that many false prophets will rise and lead them astray kind of like the situation in Ephesus and that as those things are happening Jesus warns the love of many will grow cold just like Ephesus but says Jesus the one who endures to the end will be saved and this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come so instead of letting our love grow cold we're supposed to endure to the end and what does enduring to the end entail according to Jesus in Matthew 24 it entails proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations enduring to the end without letting our love grow cold means proclaiming the gospel bearing witness to Jesus so are we doing that as a church are we being faithful to our

[41 : 52] God given commission as a lamp stand to shine the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ are we bearing witness to our neighbors that Jesus is the Christ who saves us by dying on the cross for our sins and being raised from the dead are we bearing testimony to all nations concerning Jesus are we sending and supporting missionaries that go to the nations and don't miss the fearful verdict in verse five should they fail to repent if not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent this is not a if you don't do this you know you're you're not going to get your bonus points for the assignment this is if you don't do this you're going to fail the class being a witness for Jesus Christ is not an extra credit assignment for super

Christians it is the task for you and me ordinary Christians the lampstand this is our very identity witnesses of the light of the gospel a church that does not give away the gospel will lose the gospel eventually a church that does not carry out its mission will lose its place in the mission a church that does not bear witness to Christ is a church that is on the verge of losing its lampstand in its place because a church that does not bear witness to Jesus is a church that does not know a church that does not love Christ and a church that does not love Christ is a church that does not know the love of Christ so if you don't love Jesus like you used to then you need to repent but in order for us to truly repent from our lovelessness we need to do something else first it says in verse five remember therefore from where you have fallen we need to remember the love we had at first do you remember how you used to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light do you remember that do you remember what darkness you were delivered from do you remember what wrath and justice you were saved from we are on the verge on the precipice of the fires of hell and we would have deserved every minute of it we had sinned against the holy god and

Jesus took your place he died for your sins do you remember 1 John 4 says anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins we love because he first loved us if we want to repent of our lovelessness we need to remember how we have ever love him verse seven we get the final two sections of this letter the invitation and the promise the invitation is the same in all seven letters and

I'll talk more about that in the coming weeks but the promise is wonderful it says in verse seven to the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God this is an illusion to the garden of Eden where the tree of life was in the garden but human beings because they sinned against God were exiled from the garden of Eden and their access to the tree of life was cut off and the rest of the Bible is a story of and questions of can we ever return to that place of fellowship with God and eternal life again and Jesus is promising that very thing eternal life to the one who conquers to the one who endures in faith and hope and love and shines the light of Christ till the end and there's also connection here to the image of the lamp stand remember when I preached through the furnishings within tabernacle in Exodus 25 I told you that the lamp stand was designed to look like a tree in part to resemble the tree of life that was in the garden of

Eden because now this is the abode the dwelling place of God the stand and it are the branches that are coming out of it and the light on it were the fruit and so that connected to our call as believers if we are lamp stands we are living symbols and signs to the world you can have eternal life again you can get back to the tree of life you can have fellowship with God again you can be in the paradise where God walked among us again because Jesus is the one who walks among the seven lamp stands so let us recover the love we had at first and shine God's light and let's tell the world that they can eat the fruit of eternal life that hangs from the tree of death on our behalf let's pray

[47 : 58] Lord Jesus we love you but we don't love you enough and we want to love you more because you are worthy of all our affection you are worthy of our undivided hearts you are worthy of our total allegiance so Lord forgive us help us to remember the height from which we have fallen help us remember your love for us so that we might recover that love we had at first in

Jesus name we pray amen