

010514 - LOVE LOST – LOVE FOUND

**PRE-TEXT – REVELATION 1:3 (ESV)** – before we go to our text this evening – Turn with me to **Rev. 1:3 READ** - blessed are they who read - blessed are they who listen and obey - for the time is near.

*Our text this evening is an - exhortation to the church – and to every member of it – to read and heed - for the time is near – the next great event in redemptive history is the coming of our Lord as King and judge. As we face the new year – we know – that it could be anytime – and there is no time to waste – in fulfilling the commands of our Lord.*

**LOOK NOW AT REVELATION 2:1-7 – READ – PRAYER**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

There's a southern gospel song written by **Ronnie Hinson** that you may have heard. It is entitled – *The Lighthouse* – the first verse goes like this;

*There's a lighthouse on a hillside  
That overlooks life's sea  
When I'm tossed, it sends out a light,  
That I might see  
And the light that shines in darkness now  
Will safely lead me home.  
If it wasn't for The Lighthouse  
My ship would sail no more.*

Incredibly – Hinson had never even seen a lighthouse at the time he wrote this song. Speaking of the time he actually saw a lighthouse for the first time - he said this;

*“I sat there and I saw the lighthouse and I thought, ‘what a picture. What a scene.’ The ocean was gray. It was desolate looking. It was like something out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie but there stood the lighthouse; hope in the middle of all that dreary hopelessness.”*

That lighthouse in the song – or course – is our **Lord and Savior - Jesus Christ**. [As we read – particularly during the Christmas season] - **Isaiah 9:2** prophesied that a child would be born and that – “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*” In **John 8:12** Jesus said of Himself - “*I am the Light of the world: he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness but have the Light of life.*”

Upon His resurrection and ascension, Jesus entrusted His light - under the power and authority of the Holy Spirit - to the church and to every believer in Jesus Christ.

Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 5:14-16** – “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

In the same way that a *lighthouse* holds the beacon of light sent out to guide and to save lost sailors – Jesus told us in **Matthew 5** and again in the **book of Revelation** - that the church is the *lampstand* that bears the light of Christ in a dark world until He returns.

**[BREAK IN THOUGHT]**

The second verse of *The Lighthouse* speaks of those who would like to “tear that old lighthouse down.” After all – “the big ships don’t sail this way anymore.” It is aged - archaic – it has outlived its usefulness.

The church today is often deemed to be just that – old and useless. As it has through the centuries the church must stand against enemies from without – and enemies within. If we are not careful - *WE* might dim the light ourselves and even allow it to go out altogether.

The church at Ephesus – one of the great churches of the NT - serves as *the* example of a church that *allowed its light to go out*. Jesus warned them – and exhorted them in **Revelation 2**, to return to where they had once been, or He would remove their *lampstand* – He would remove their influence for Christ in the world.

The Ephesians didn’t heed God’s warnings – and their lampstand was indeed removed. *If this powerful and influential church failed in its mission – what about the church today – what about our church today? Can that happen to us? Will it happen to us? Can we prevent it from happening to us – and if so - how?*

### **III. EXEGESIS – **Rev. 2:1-7****

Looking back at our text we see that the one speaking is called - “*The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand...*” This is *Jesus Christ Himself* speaking to the church.

Earlier in **1:17-18** He identified Himself saying – “*I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore...*” It could be no one else.

Notice that in **Revelation 1:13** we are told that Jesus is in the *midst of the lampstands* which are the churches – and in in **Revelation 2:1**, we are told that He *walks* among the *lampstands*. Such is the *intimate relationship* that Jesus has with His church.

So intimate is that relationship that in **Romans 12:5** and **1 Corinthians 12:12** – the church is referred to as the “*Body of Christ*” and in **Ephesians**; **2 Corinthians** and later in

**Revelation** - the church is described as the **“Bride of Christ.”** Jesus loved His church so much – that – according to **Acts 20:28** – “He obtained with His blood.” **[BREAK IN THOUGHT]**

In chapters **2 and 3 of Revelation**, Jesus addresses the seven churches in Asia – which is now modern Turkey. **Eight times** in those two chapters Jesus says to the churches – **“I know your works...”**

There is more than one word in the Greek language for **“know.”** The word used here is **“oida.”** This is **not a partial knowing** or **a growing knowledge** over time but rather – **it means a full and complete knowledge.** He says;

- To Ephesus in (**Rev. 2:2**) He says – **“I know your works and your perseverance”**,
- To Smyrna (**Rev. 2:9**) He says – **“I know your tribulation and your poverty”**,
- To Thyatira (**Rev. 2:19**) He says – **“I know your faith and service”**, *[and then to each church].*

He intimately knows everything about His church and everyone who makes **UP** His church including their **actions, motivations, deepest thoughts** and **their hearts.** He knows both the good and the bad.

He admonishes five of the seven churches for allowing sin to be practiced within the lives of the people and within the church. He warned them that - **unless they repented and turned away from their sin** – Jesus would bring judgment against them.

In the case of the church at Ephesus – **v.5** He exhorted them to - **“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.”**

## **II. LOSING OUR FIRST LOVE – THE CHURCH**

**So, what went wrong in Ephesus?** The city of Ephesus, at the time of Paul was one of the most important cities in the NT. **Acts 18-20** show us the important role Ephesus played in the ministry of Paul and in the evangelizing of the early church. In fact, it was from Ephesus that the other churches mentioned in **Revelation 2-3** - were founded.

The Apostle Paul first came to Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey around 52 AD bringing **Priscilla and Aquila** with him (**Acts 18:19**). Priscilla and Aquila were husband and wife and were traveling and ministering together with Paul.

It was through the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila that the teacher Apollos was taught greater knowledge of the gospel. He became a powerful preacher of the word throughout the region. (**Acts 18:24**).

Upon his return, Paul lived and ministered in Ephesus for three years, performing many miracles (**Acts 19:11**). Ephesus was known for its pagan temple and idolatry. Through Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, there was a mass turning away from cultic practices (**Acts 19:19**).

When Paul writes his epistles to Timothy, Timothy is the pastor of the Ephesian church.

And – historians tell us that Mary – the mother of Jesus – most likely lived out her days in Ephesus and the Apostle John lived his last decades there – writing his gospel – his epistles and the book of Revelation while living there. *That is quite a legacy.*

**BREAK IN THOUGHT**

God worked mightily through the church of Ephesus in Paul’s day. The Ephesians’ were known for their faith and *love for Christ* and *love for the brethren*. In his letter to Ephesians – Paul specifically commends them in **Ephesians 1:15** - “*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers*”

But now, 40 years later **Rev. 2:4** tells us that Jesus rebuked them because *they had lost that love*. What changed?

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century when the Apostle John writes the book of Revelation - *Ephesus was still a very busy church*. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire and an administrative center of the province.

It was renowned for its religious shrines, spacious theater, a stadium that could hold 25,000, and elegant public buildings that gave Ephesus an important place in the life of the entire region.

It was also famous for the Temple of Diana where their pagan worship included the magic arts, prostitution and mutilation. *There was much to be done for God in the city of Ephesus.*

Through all of this the Ephesian Church stood strong. Jesus commends in **verses 2, 3 of Revelation 2** - for their *hard work, patience* and *stand against heresy and paganism*.

*However*, they were now lacking the very thing for which they were commended four decades earlier. In **v.4** Jesus tells them – “*But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*”

In the busyness of church life – their reason for loving Christ had become *secondary* to the work they were doing. They were a *religious church* – an *orthodox church* – a *busy church*. But they had lost *the reason* for all their busyness - *they had lost their focus on Christ*.

It is important to understand that – it was not taken from them – **v.4** says “*you left your first love*” – they had walked away from it.

Professor Alan Johnson in the Bible Expositor’s Commentary sums up the point as it relates to Ephesus and the church in our day;

*“Loving devotion to Christ can be lost in the midst of active service, and certainly no amount of orthodoxy can make up for a failure to love one another.”*

***In seems unlikely doesn't it*** – that a great church like Ephesus would fail? It begs the question – could our church fail? And, it is here that we should learn from the church at Ephesus and the other churches mentioned in **Revelation 2-3**. Four other churches in these chapters - were also admonished by Jesus, but for different reasons – and we should pay attention to these things as well:

***Pergamum (2:12-17) was a divided church.*** While some in the church were faithful to Jesus Christ, others were involved in pagan worship outside the church – without fear of repercussion. Church discipline was unknown, ***compromising the purity of the church.***

***Thyatira (2:18-29) was a tolerant church.*** The church at Thyatira tolerated the teachings of a false prophetess within the church, ***corrupting the truth of the gospel.***

***Sardis (3:1-6) was a dead church.*** This church existed and was going through the motions but their works were of no value ***[assimilated into the culture – no difference could be seen]*** and ***JESUS DECLARES THEM DEAD.*** He said - ***“I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.”*** They were doing religion – not for the love of Christ – ***but for the sake of being religious.***

***Laodicea (3:14-21), the church most associated with our own church era, was a lukewarm church.*** It was a church of spiritual apathy and complacency. They were wealthy - self-reliant - and proud. In their own estimation - they were in need of nothing. But, Jesus called them – ***“wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.”***

***Professor W.M. Ramsay, in his book, Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia, concluded that it is difficult to describe the church at Laodicea. John mentions no notable achievements with which to identify it. They apparently - did not zealously stand for anything.***

***Does any of this sound familiar in churches of our day?***

To that we would have to answer – yes! Paul warns us of the problem in **Colossians 2:8** – ***“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”***

There is a common denominator between the churches of John's day and some churches in our own. They have replaced the love of Christ as the head of His church - with other interests. Rather than focusing solely on Christ – they focus ***internally*** on themselves - or ***externally*** on the world – ***often both*** - rather than ***ETERNALLY*** on Christ.

One well-known televangelist said this - ***“God has to be given permission to work in this earthly realm on behalf of man...Yes! You are in control. So if man has control, who no longer has it?...God!”*** It is estimated that this man preaches to more than 18,000 every week and thousands more through cable television. ***[Frederick KC Price]***

Many of our major seminaries are teaching a theology that combines evangelical thought with ancient Jewish - Roman mysticism – and eastern philosophy - as the way to live more like Christ.

In some churches – the preaching of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is abandoned in favor of what is called “*progressive dialogue*” - where the congregation – saved and unsaved alike - determines the truth, relevance and applicability of Scripture.

And preference and felt needs replace of the people trump their spiritual needs - of repentance from sin, forgiveness and reconciliation with our Lord – our need of God’s mercy and grace.

### **III. LOSING OUR FIRST LOVE - THE CHRISTIAN**

*How does the church get to the point of losing Christ as their first love?* Much of it begins with you and me. **1 Corinthians 12:27** tells us that – “<sup>27</sup>...*you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*”

As members of His church we bear responsibility for our part before the Lord. ***So how is it that we can allow ourselves to lose Christ as our first love?*** There are many ways – but consider these:

First, is to ***fail to commit to the church AT ALL***. This is not a treatise on church membership – but the importance of the commitment to the local church through membership is of utmost importance. Membership is ***more than a pledge on a piece of paper or having your name on the roster of membership.***

It is to commit yourself to the ***doctrinal teaching of the church – to place yourself under the care and authority of the elders*** – and to commit to ***loving fellowship*** – participating in the Gospel with your brothers and sisters in Christ – within the church where the Lord has placed you ***[more information]***.

***In worship - we have lost our first love if our preferences*** in music and worship style trump the hunger for the truth of God’s word.

We lose our first love when our Christianity becomes ***limited to a Sunday morning service*** – living the rest of the week in and for the world – forgetting Jesus’ words in **Luke 9:23** – “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*”

And in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** we read – “*You are not your own, <sup>20</sup>for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*”

***When the busyness of life becomes our focus – we have lost our first love.*** Like the Ephesian church we can get lost in all of our responsibilities of life and even in the

church. The late Pastor and author Ray Stedman summed it up well – “*Gradually there comes an almost imperceptible shift of focus. We get busy... We go on doing the same things but not from the same drive or motive. We drift into the loss of first love.*”

*We have lost Christ as our first love when we allow the world to dominate our lives.* We spend so much time involved with the world that we have no energy for things of God. Study time and prayer time dwindle and often simply stop. We become spiritually apathetic and complacent. *No one sees the light of Christ in us anymore.*

*And again – when we no longer discern the difference in sound doctrine and unsound doctrine.* Have you been to - a Christian. TV, radio - bookstore lately? Right next the Bible section *[which is often very small]* there are hundreds of books and CD’s on everything from alternative forms of worship to Christian psychology and even fiction – all claiming to contain biblical truth. They can sound so good and seem so spiritual and “*Christian*” but, if we take the time to examine them in the light of Scripture – we find that they lack the truth of Scripture.

Paul warned Timothy in *2 Tim. 4:4-5* that – “*The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.*”

*The love of Christ is lost when we allow unrepented sin into our lives that compromises our fellowship with God and the church.* We violate God’s command in *1 Peter 1:16* to - “*Be holy for I am holy.*”

*Love is lost when we tolerate sin within the church without reproof or correction.* Far be it from us to offend anyone – so ignore or tolerate sinful behavior in God’s church. Church discipline is dismissed as being unloving and judgmental - *and the holiness of the church is compromised – and our first love is ignored – and lost.*

*Our service to the Lord and others become self-serving not God serving.* Have you ever told yourself that you are only one who can possibly be counted on to get anything done? Have you become critical of others and even of our church leaders? Are you serving – no long out of love – but out of obligation – if so – you have lost your first love.

Ray Stedman points out three signs or symptoms that one has abandoned Jesus Christ as his or her first love.

- ***We lose joy in our Christian walk*** – If left alone even the Christian life can take on a routine and monotony. We just go through the motions. If there is prayer or Bible study it has little impact on our lives. Being in church and with fellow believers isn’t much different than being anywhere else – just another appointment on our calendar.
- ***Loss of love*** – *We lose the love we once had for Jesus.* We know and believe that He first loved us and died for our sins. But, the knowledge of what Jesus did for us no longer impacts our heart and our mind. And, *we lose the ability to love*

others as well. **Love of Christ and love of others go hand in hand.** When we can truly love others we do so because Christ first loved us – when we deeply love the Lord, we can't help but love others.

- ***We lose a healthy perspective on ourselves*** – Our own lives, our own comforts – even our complaints become the foremost in our thinking. We are no longer concerned for others as we used to be.

Charles Spurgeon said it this way - ***“It is the loss of your first love that makes you seek the comfort of your bodies instead of the prosperity of your souls.”***

This isn't necessarily saying that we don't love Jesus anymore. ***He just doesn't hold the position of preeminence in our lives as He once did.*** At one time or another – most if not all Christians fall into these patterns.

Some find their way out by turning back to their first love. Some don't – they lose joy and peace in their hearts, minds and souls. And more tragically, like the churches of Revelation – ***they are no long the salt and light to the world.***

#### **IV. RETURNING TO OUR FIRST LOVE**

Does any of this sound familiar in your life? If so – what now? – What needs to be done to put return to first love with Christ?

Start by recalling the greatest commandment found in **Matthew 22:37** – ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.”***

He need to put Jesus Christ back on the throne of your life. It should be evident in His warning to the churches that He loves you enough to compel you to return to Him as your first love. He often does so by disciplining us as a loving Father – as mentioned in **Hebrews 12** - and always by conviction of the Holy Spirit. If you are under that conviction tonight – what should you do? Jesus Himself tells us how in **Revelation 2:5**.

##### **a. Remember**

First - ***“Remember therefore from where you have fallen.”*** This is not about how you felt. Many have experienced great emotion upon their conversion to Christ – many did not. Many serve with great emotion and many do not. This is about remembering how you responded to Jesus Christ before you began falling away – how your ***devotion, enthusiasm and energy were all motivated – not by self - by your love for Jesus Christ.***

***We can do that by remembering who Christ is.*** In the opening chapters of the book of **Hebrews** – the author admonishes his readers for not maturing in Christ as they should - and he warns them against drifting away from the faith they once had.

He *begins* the letter in chapter 1 – *not by chastising them* – but by *reacquainting* his readers with the *source of their salvation and strength*. He reminds his readers – as we should be - of;

- **The Pre-Eminence of Christ *over* all things**
- **The Incomparability of Christ *against* all things**
- **The Supremacy of Christ *in* all things**
- **The Sufficiency of Christ *for* all things -**

Hebrews 1:1-3 reminds us that:

*Jesus Christ is the creator of all things.* Everything around you - He created. The heavens and the earth and everything in them – Jesus Christ created. He alone has the power to create out of nothing – He alone is the giver and sustainer of life. He is the one who gave you your children and grandchildren life.

John 3:1 says - *“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”*

*[It also reminds us] That “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His NATURE.” As we just read -* For all the things that Jesus is to us– our Creator, our Savior and our friend – *He is first and foremost God and is to be worshipped as God.*

*And that “He upholds everything by the power of His word.”* Jesus is the moment-by-moment sustainer and unifying power of the universe. We owe Him *“our everything”* for He has given us everything by His grace – mercy – provision – and steadfast love.

*And - Remember that He purified you of your sins – He died for you – that you might live – and live eternally.*

Charles Spurgeon once wrote – *“Do you think that perhaps you have forgotten how much you owe to Christ? There is one thing that I feel from experience I am compelled to do very often – to go back to where I first started - “I, the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me.”*

Paul reminded his readers of the gospel story in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to Cephas then to the twelve...”*

We often overlook or at least take for granted - the price that Jesus paid on that cross for us. Luke 22:44 tells us that while in Gethsemane that Jesus - *“In agony... prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”*

He did so, not so much from fear of the pain of the cross – but rather the *effect of the cross* – that being – taking all of sin of man – from all generations upon Himself –

suffering the wrath of God – so that we didn't have to. **2 Corinthians 5:21** says that – ***“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”***

And, **Isaiah 53:5** prophesied that He would not just die but be ***crushed*** for our iniquities. Having been made sin in our behalf – in your behalf - the full fury of God's wrath against sin was brought to bear on His own Son. So much so that, the Father had to turn away from the Him – as Jesus cried, ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”***

***THAT IS TRUE AND UNDYING LOVE*** - ***“In that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*** that passage in **Romans 8** goes on to say – ***“We have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life” (vv. 6-10).***

Friends, He gave everything for you. How much should we be willing to give back to Him? How hard should we be working – every day, every hour – to love Him for all He has done?

So the first remedy Christ gives in **Revelation 2:5** is to ***remember*** where you once were.

#### b. ***Repent***

***Secondly*** - having renewed our love for Him, we are then ***called to repent***. Repent in English conveys the idea of being sorrowful. The Greek meaning, however, means a change of mind – and attitude that produces changed behavior.

This is not repentance for salvation. If Christ has been your first love – you are securely in Him. In **John 10:28** Jesus promises – ***“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*** This repentance carries the same idea as expressed to believers in **1 John 1:9** – ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***

#### c. ***Return***

After returning Christ to His rightful position in our lives through the repenting of our sins we are exhorted by the Holy Spirit to return to the good things we were doing before we drifted away.

Having returned to our first love and ***freed from the burden of living on our own strength – reenergized by the Holy Spirit*** - we are ready again to serve God ***enthusiastically*** out of our love for Him because it is His love that motivates us once again. We are motivated by the fact that:

**Ephesians 2:10** says that – ***“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”***

As true and willing servants of the Lord we are not living lives for ourselves, but rather to do **HIS** bidding - **Philippians 2:13** – “*For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good.*”

And what He gives us to do, will always produce good fruit - **Philippians 1:6** – “*And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*”

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

With **Revelation 2** in mind – there are only three categories of people here today;

1. **Those in Love**
  2. **Those who have fallen out of love**
  3. **Those who have never been in love**
- **For those who love** - message is ***Stay the Course*** – Be God’s light in this dark world. To each of the seven churches of Revelation, Jesus promises blessings to those who overcome. I hope you will read those this week as encouragement to hold fast. Here is the promised blessing to the church as Ephesus – “*To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*”
  - **For those who have fallen out of love** - refer to above – Jesus’ message in **Rev. 2-3** is for you – remember from the love from which you have fallen – repent of the sin that caused you to fall – and return to Jesus Christ – who loved you first – last and forevermore.

Jesus Christ is calling you back to Himself. You do know that He is. The Holy Spirit is convicting you - compelling you to return. There may be difficulties in your life as a result of your falling away from loving Christ. He says in **Rev. 3:19** – “*those whom I love, I reprove and discipline – therefore be zealous and repent.*”

- **For those who have never loved** – never committed their lives to Jesus Christ - Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand – Jesus took your sin to be His own – if you respond to His call this evening – He will replace your sin with His righteousness. He will give you joy and peace you have never known before. There is no other way – “*Jesus said...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*”

Let’s close our time together with this word from the Lord – found in the book of **Jude vv.17-23** - “*But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They’ said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” <sup>19</sup> It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment’ stained by the flesh. <sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his*

*glory with great joy,<sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*

**PRAYER**

**CLOSING HYMN – In Times Like These – pg. 420**