

05. Ephesus: Where's the Love? Pt 2

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Letters from Jesus

By Robert Rohlin

Bible Text: Revelation 2:1-7

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First Baptist Church Las Colinas

1930 Gateway Drive

Irving, TX 75038-2405

Website: www.firstbaptistlascolinas.org/

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/rrohlin>

I'm going to ask you to take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 2. As I mentioned, you'll have to bear with me this morning. I taught a CHL class yesterday and normally in every class that I teach, I demonstrate how to respond to an intruder and how to yell commands because you need to do that when you're in a crisis. You have what's called auditory exclusion and you can't always hear people coming up around you, behind you, you develop tunnel vision and a lot of other things and so by yelling out commands, it helps you break your own body alarm response, it's called. So it's in an important thing. I usually demonstrate that. I did not demonstrate it yesterday to the degree which I normally do and so when I got home, my kids said, "Daddy, your voice sounds normal and I noticed that you didn't yell as much today." Faith was in class with me and one of my other daughters said, "Does daddy yell?" Which by the way, I'm glad she could ask that because I never had to ask that about my own dad. Anyway, "Does daddy yell?" and I said, "Oh yeah, let me demonstrate," and I did and now because of that, I don't have my normal speaking voice today so I apologize for that.

Also, I just had, I don't know why, you know how you see something and you associate it and a memory that you haven't had in a long time pops back in your head because all those things are tied together somewhere in your gray matter and Dayton and I were talking about Lubbock and Slaton and I've lived in both of those cities and I have some fond memories of both those places but I remember when I was on the football team in high school in Slaton, Texas and I don't know if you know this but pretty well, sooner or later every football player gets a nickname. The coach never calls you by your right name if you've ever done anything to earn a nickname. One day during drills, we were out doing drills and we were not wearing helmets which is a stupid thing and I collided with another player and knocked him out and coach called me Hardhead from then on. He never knew my name again. One day though, he told me, you know, I guess coaches are born to encourage people, right? One day he said, "Hardhead, come here." I said, "Yes Sir." He said, "I want to tell you right now that you need to either go to a Catholic school or Georgia Tech when you graduate." I said, "Why would you say that?" He said, "Because you're going to get a nickname. You're either going to be the rambling wreck from Georgia Tech or the total loss from Holy Cross." So that was his gift of encouragement that day.

We want to go back to Ephesians 2 and I don't know that I've gotten last week's sermon online so I'll make sure to do that this afternoon but we're looking at the first of the letters to the seven churches and we spent about a month looking at the vision of Christ in Revelation 1 and we got into Ephesians 2 last time and we made it about halfway through. By way of review, let's just look at a few of the things here. One, we talked about how churches really should grow. Churches have to grow first spiritually and then they can grow numerically and then they can grow financially but we have to grow spiritually first. Until we deepen our message, deepen our walk with Christ, God won't broaden our coast, won't enlarge our coast or broaden our ministry. There was one essential quality we identified that more than anything else is required of a church and that is that we have genuine love. We need genuine love for Christ and we need genuine love for one another and we need genuine love for all those to whom we have an opportunity to minister.

Now, Paul had written to the Ephesians and in Ephesians 3 he talked and he prayed and he said: I pray that you be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man. I pray that you would have a deep walk with Christ. I pray that you be rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the depth and the height and the length of God's love. Of course, the breadth of God's love is that, "For God so loved the whole world." The depth of God's love is, "that he sent his only begotten Son that whosoever would believe in him should not perish." The height of God's love is, "so that they should have eternal life." Then he goes on and he says, "I pray that you would intimately experience the love of Christ that passes all other knowledge and to be filled with the fullness of God." It's kind of like throwing a Coke bottle in the ocean. The Coke bottle is filled up but there is still a lot more ocean. He said, "I pray that you would be filled with all of God even though there is more God than you can ever possibly hope." But somehow or other, the Ephesians had missed it and now some 43 years later, we're reading the words of Jesus Christ written to that same church at Ephesus that Paul had emphasized needed love and in Revelation 2, he says, "I have something to say against you, that you have lost your first love."

Let's look at the verses again. Revelation 2 and read with me,

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the

churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

So this passage starts with the Lord commending the laborers. Now, what the Ephesian church did right, he says, "You were diligent for God." He says, "I know your works," and by that he means individual things that you've done for God, individual projects that you've taken on for the kingdom. He says, "I am aware of those and I know your labor," and here he's saying that it's not just a matter of a few big individual projects that they did for Christ but they had a continuing lifelong pattern of service for probably the last 43 years now; since the Apostle Paul had ministered to them in Ephesus, these people had been consistently serving the Lord faithfully. The church at Ephesus we know at one time had 60,000 members in it. It was a huge church for its day, particularly considering that there was only 250,000 people in the city of Ephesus so at one time, nearly 1/4 of the city was Christians.

Then he says, "I know your patience." In other words, it hasn't been a matter of you serve and then you don't serve, you're kind of on-again and off-again and we've got people that even come here that are like that, that they're really on fire for the Lord for five, six, seven weeks and then you don't see them for three or four months and then they come back. It's that on-again off-again and he says, "No, you're not the on-again, off-again Christians. You're the unswerving kinds of Christians." So their patience.

Then they hated evil. He says, "You despise evil. You hate the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. You're against the false teachers." What an amazing thing. He says, "You don't tolerate those that live in evil and you're discerning of the truth. You know when a teacher is teaching you something that is not from the word of God. You know the Nicolaitans are wrong." Now, the Nicolaitans we find out from another letter later in the letters to the seven churches, were a group of people who were like the prophet Balaam in the Old Testament who tried to tell King Balac that he could pervert Israel by getting them to intermarry and start worshiping other gods and that would bring the downfall of Israel and so the doctrine of the Nicolaitans is basically people who say, "Hey, once you're saved, once your ticket is punched, once you get going to heaven, do whatever you want to. It doesn't matter whether you honor all of God's standards for marriage and God's standards for finances or God's standards for moral purity. It doesn't matter. After all, you're going to heaven. You're already forgiven so why not do what you want to do?" That's the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and Jesus says that he hates that.

So they are despising evil and they are discerning of truth. Now, I've got to be honest with you that if I look at that list of qualifications for a church, I think a lot of those fit here at our church and quite frankly, as a pastor, I look at those qualifications and when you pastor a church like that, you kind of want to go and brag to other pastors, "Well, let me tell you about my church." I'd be a little proud of that kind of church and yet in the midst of all this, the Lord rebukes the church rather than bragging on it. Now, the good thing is he does commend them first before he criticizes them.

Funny thing was, I heard a story this last week. You never know, parents, how your little ones are listening to the message. So this last week there was a four year old in our congregation who was just drawing on pieces of paper and writing little scribbles that maybe weren't intelligible but he brought them to his parents and he says, "Look, here's a letter to the seven churches." So you've got four year olds that are listening. I think that's cool. Another parent told me that this week they got onto one of their kids for not having taken the trash out and the little boy turns around to his mother and says, "Now mother, aren't you supposed to commend me first?" So she had to say, "Well, you know, I really admire what you've been doing with your dad and spending time, that quality work and I want you to go back to that as soon as you take care of taking out the trash." He was happy then. So beware, they're listening. They're listening.

But he says, "Here's the problem," he says, "you've lost your first love." In the English Standard Version it says, "I have this against you that you've abandoned the love that you had at first." You've abandoned the love that you had at first. You see, you know, what should be happening ideally is that we so keep growing in our love for Jesus Christ that when we look back on our lives, we think, "I love him so much more now than I used to." I remember when Judy and I were about to get married that Judy's mother told me, she says, "You just think you love Judy now but you just wait. One day you'll realize that what you have now is just puppy love compared to what you're going to have." She was right. She was right. There is a deepening of that love over the years and you realize there was a lot of emotions and probably hormones too built up in that early love but there is something even deeper now.

I gave you kind of a homework assignment and that homework assignment was to read the description of what a first love was from Jeremiah 2:1-2 and that's kind of where we left it so let's look at this and I think I would call Jeremiah 2 maybe the first three verses, a love that goes beyond the requirements. Do you all know what I mean when I say that sometimes in marriage, sometimes in families, we take each other a little for granted, don't we? You kind of get so busy. You know you love one another, you enjoy being together but sometimes you get so busy that two or three days will go by and it's like you haven't really sat down and had a meaningful conversation with one another. Is there anybody here that's married besides me that's ever experienced that problem? Judy, you can go ahead and raise your hand. Okay, that happens. It happens. It's just that you get into the business of life. We ought to be growing in our love and growing in our fervor toward one another and what's neat though is that when you do stop and remember and demonstrate it to your spouse, then suddenly it's really special.

A number of years ago, I have figured out that if I do anything right as a husband, it's because I tripped over it and fell into it. I do things right by accident and then I learn and so a few years ago I just was, I don't know, saw a link on the Internet or maybe heard a radio ad or something about a six pack. Now, I'm not talking about the kind you drink so relax and put the hymnal down. But it was a Symphony six pack which meant that for one price, you could buy tickets to any six symphony performances of the Fort Worth Symphony and it was a pretty low price and I thought, "Well, why not do that?" So I paid it and I didn't think that much about it. I have real problems with composers, by the way.

None of them knew how to spell their name. Okay, D-vo-r-a-k. That ought to be Dvorak. I'm sorry, that's the way it sounds, it's Dvorak. But the guys name was Devorzhack. Now, why don't they spell it like Devorzhack if that was his real name and he's only one of many composers that didn't know how to properly spell his name so, you know, I go in there and that just drives me nuts. But I like listening to good music and I like listening, there is nothing like listening to music live. You can't ever create a CD that sounds as good as hearing it live and that's why I appreciate these folks that get up here every week and really add to the service.

Anyway, I'm in the car and we're driving up Highway 287, going toward downtown Fort Worth to go to this concert and my wife suddenly says, "You know, I want to tell you how much I appreciate the fact that you're still investing in our marriage by buying these symphony tickets," and I thought, "Did I do that?" I didn't know I did it. I just bought some tickets, thought it was a nice thing to do but I realized that to her it was a big deal. Of course, she has her music degree and it is a big deal to her. She knows how to actually pronounce all those names so it's a big deal to her. And it's like when you do one of those things, suddenly it really gets noticed and it also gets noticed when it goes the other way, that you don't really, you kind of slip out of the habit of connecting. So Judy and I this last week, we were sitting in our bedroom and we've got two chairs that face one another and I kind of had my head down in the computer which is pretty typical of me and then all of a sudden I look up and Judy is staring at me. So I did what I always do when Judy stares at me, I checked my shirt to see what I had spilled on it and I couldn't find a stain anywhere and I said, "What is it?" She said, "I just love you and appreciate you." That was a surprise because, you know, after you've been married 34 years, you don't have a lot of those long gazes where somebody is just appreciating you anymore and it's like when it happens, you look for the stain on your shirt and then when you find out what it is, you think, "Oh, that's really cool. That's really cool. I like that. It's good to hear that sort of thing again."

But I want us to look at Jeremiah 2:1-2. In the King James it says it this way, "Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." God says, "I remember your lovingkindness." That word "kindness" there is kind of an interesting Hebrew word. It's the Hebrew word "chesed" which is usually a word that's used to talk of God's lovingkindness and mercy toward man but here he says, it's Israel loving God, reflecting God's love back to him. Let's face it, isn't that what love really ought to be? We love someone so deeply and they should reflect the love that we have back to us. It's a two-way street and we ought to love God. God already is crazy about every one of us. He loves us absolutely and we should be reflecting that love back to him and that's what he says. It's a covenant relationship that goes beyond the legal requirements. Now, we all know there are certain things we need to do to be a responsible, faithful husband or a good, dutiful wife and so I know that I need to make a living for my family and I need to take my family to church and I need to pray with them, I need to take them out and spend one-on-one time with the kids and I need to listen to their hearts and there's a lot of stuff I need to do. I kind of have this mental list of things

that Robert needs to do to be a good husband and I know that my wife has a list of those things that she needs to do in her mind to be a good wife. And yet, what chesed is is when it's more than just what is required; it's more than what's on the normal activity list. It is a passionate desire to love and focus and follow the other person. Now, the ESV says it this way, he says, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, "I remember the devotion of your youth."'" He says, "You were devoted. You were totally devoted. How as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown."

Now, let's talk a moment in this picture that Jeremiah is being given by the Lord. God is saying, "Listen, it's kind of like we're married," and as far as you look in the Old Testament, there was never another nation that God said he was married to but he talks about Israel in the Old Testament as his wife. He talks about the church in the New Testament as the bride of Christ. So he says that he married you, he took on covenant vows. He bound himself to her. He protected her. He chose to honor and cherish and keep her in sickness and in health so much so that in Jeremiah 2:3, it says, "Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him," meaning Israel, "shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD." He says, "I'm going to defend you so zealously that if anybody attacks you, evil is going to come upon them. I will devour them instead." He protected them zealously. He protected them so zealously, Exodus 23:22, it says the promise he had given her, talking about the nation of Israel in the wilderness was, "I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." God was passionate about Israel. This is a husband who wants to protect his wife.

Then he brought her out of bondage. She was in slavery and he basically redeemed her and brought her out. The book of Hosea is a beautiful picture where God shows that he loves us when we're not worth loving and he redeems us and buys us out of slavery.

Then he says he brought them into a bountiful country. By the way, I want you to notice there in chapter 2, verse 7, that God brings us into a bountiful country. I know some people that think that God's job in heaven is to be a cosmic killjoy. He's there to make sure that we abide by the rules and regulations and if we don't keep rules and regulations, he's going to zap us with a lightning bolt, pang, hit us from heaven and he's going to zap us. God loves you. He's obsessed by you. He's fanatical about you to the extent that he would let his own Son die because that's how crazy he is about you and he's not there to be cosmic killjoy and a rule-keeper. He's there to give you a life that's abundant and joyful.

Now, look at the kind of love that Israel has back because for 40 years and this is the period, he says there in Jeremiah 2, he says, "I loved you. Remember when we were in the wilderness together?" I don't know if you all ever had a wilderness together. I remember our first seminary apartment. It was tiny. When Judy and I got married, I didn't feel like we had much between the two of us and then God blessed us and he gave us an apartment full of furniture and we had this little tiny apartment. The whole thing would have fit in here about, I don't know, five or six times. It was pretty small. The walls were

paper-thin. You got to know your neighbors better than you intended. I remember one day, we had one of these bathroom cabinets that you put your pills on and you open the mirror and there are the little shelves inside and there is a thin sheet of metal in the back. Well, that sheet of metal is all that separated you from the other apartment. Not like there's insulation in the walls or anything. I remember we had some new neighbors move in next door from Mississippi, Steve and Sherry Smith and Sherry was trying to really be a good pastor's wife and work on her piano playing skills. It's helpful if you're a pastor's wife if you can play the piano so she's in there and she is working on it and she made it all the way through, "What a friend we have in Jesus," without making a single mistake and my wife wanted to encourage her and she had the bathroom cabinet open and could hear it all very well so she shouted, she said, "Good job! Do it again! Encore! Encore!" Just at that moment, Brother Steve flushed the toilet on the other side of the wall. You really did get to know your neighbors well back then. Yet, I look back sometimes on that tiny little apartment with very little room and we didn't have much and they were some of the sweetest times of fellowship that we had. You see, you don't have to have a lot to enjoy life. An abundance of things doesn't really bring joy. The fact is, the more stuff you own, the more it owns you.

So there was a special fellowship that came in at that time so he says, "Okay, for 40 years out in the wilderness, you followed me." There was one brief moment of murmuring but generally speaking for those 40 years, they got up every morning and they saw where God was going and they followed his Shekinah glory. It was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and they followed him wherever he went. It was a wilderness and it doesn't mean it was all desert, all sand, but it was a wilderness. There weren't any crops as a rule. There weren't any vineyards. Sometimes there wasn't water but they followed him. But what happened in the wilderness? First of all, God led them so every day there was that Shekinah presence of God and wherever he went, they went. Then God fed them. Bruce Wilkerson in fact, is the one who writes that because they had 3 million people at this time, that would have been a 40 mile long parade. If they were walking 50 across, it would have taken them two days to get across the Red Sea so that whole thing of God holding Pharaoh's army back and parting the waters and walking across, it takes about, what? Five minutes of the Ten Commandments movie with Charlton Heston but in reality God had to keep that whole thing up for a couple of days to get everybody across.

Then once they decided not to go into the Promised Land and that was disappointing to God and he said, "You're going to have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years because there is this generation here that doesn't trust me," and God weeded them out. The young people grew up and they really began to focus their attentions on God and they followed him and they loved him and every day, God fed them. God fed them and the fact is, it took an equivalent of 160 boxcars of food every day and most days, now some days they had a little variety in their diet, I didn't recognize this for a long time until I read Deuteronomy 2:6 but most of the time they went out and if they hadn't been near somewhere else where they could buy food or something from other people living in the terrain, they went out and they had this stuff on the ground that they never could name and so they just called it "what is it?" I've actually seen a few dinner creations that I've been at at different tables before. Judy and I used to go every Sunday to this widow lady's

house because we'd take her to church in Nacogdoches, Texas and she insisted that we come to lunch. If we wanted to go out to a restaurant, we weren't allowed to. We had to go to this lady's house. I was so glad that Judy and I went to Taiwan in 1982 for two months and the pastor and his wife had to go over there and take her because that's the period of time that she decided to serve squirrel stew and the pastor told me there were still little squirrel hairs floating in the stew. I was glad to miss that one section.

But we'd always go over to her house and sometimes she'd serve something and I thought what is it? The Hebrew word for that is "man" and that's where we get the word "manna" from. When they went out and picked up this frost off the ground that they made bread out of, they said, "I don't know what it is. It's man, what is it?" and so they fixed "what is it" every day. Then they had water and it took an equivalent of 1,000 tank cars of water every day so you put all that together, that's a 9 1/2 mile long train every single day that had to be supplied in terms of food and water to the nation of Israel and yet God did it. By the way, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 4, the Apostle Paul talks about the water situation. You remember when they came to a place and they didn't have water, God told Moses, he says, "Take your rod. Smite the rock," and water came out of the rock and so he did and water came out and in 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul says in talking about this wilderness wandering, he says, "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." In the Jewish targum which is a commentary on the Jewish Scriptures, it says that everywhere they camped for 40 years, there was a rock and water would gush out and they had that so it wasn't maybe just a single one time occurrence.

What else did God do for them in the wilderness? Well, he clothed them. The Bible tells us that their shoes didn't fall apart, their clothes didn't fall apart. I'm sure some woman got up in her tent in the morning and said, "You know, I've worn this three days in a row, I'm sick of it," but anyway. By and large though, it was amazing how well the clothes were. Then God protected them. But look how Israel responded to God and this is the picture that God is trying to get through to the nation of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah. Now listen to what God says to the nation of Judah. He says, first of all, Israel focused on God. The first thing is when they were in the wilderness, any time the Shekinah glory went somewhere, they moved. If you got up in the morning and you looked outside your tent and you saw the cloud moving away from the tabernacle and you saw the priests very quickly packing up the tabernacle, everybody got up together very quickly in every family and they folded up their tents, they put their stuff on carts and they started following the cloud. They didn't know if they were going two miles or five miles or ten miles that day but they followed the cloud and when the cloud stopped, they pitched camp again but for 40 years they followed. They wandered around and around and those people that had tracked their wanderings, it's a pretty snakelike configuration but they followed him. They focused on him and then they followed him. And they did so without questioning. They didn't ask, "Now God, before we move, can you please tell us where we're going and why we're going there because I want to know if it's really worth the trip?" They didn't ask that. They just followed him.

Then Israel had faith in God to supply all their needs. Now, in Deuteronomy 2:6 it says this, "You shall buy meat of them for money that you may eat. You shall also buy water of them for money that you may drink." So when Israel was near some other community during their wilderness wandering, they were allowed to take their money which remember, they left Egypt with a whole bunch of it. Pharaoh was so glad to get rid of them that he loaded their carts with gold and silver and so they would redeem some of the money so it wasn't manna every day but God provided manna every day when they needed it but sometimes they could go out and they could spend money and they could buy it and they could get the food and get the water that they needed but the point is, it was either through God's provision in advance because when he got them to leave Israel, he sent them out with riches and then while they were in the wilderness, he takes care of them. By the way, let me explain one other thing: if you did have money on your carts when you left Israel, every time you spent it, what happened to your reserve? You see, they couldn't invest it. It wasn't in the stock market so every time you spent it, it was gone so for 40 years, their worldly resources, the stuff they left Egypt with are dwindling, dwindling, dwindling and yet God was always enough. In fact, I think the relationship to the Lord probably got sweeter the more of the world's stuff they gave away. They had faith in God to supply all their needs. By the way, I think we're due for another time like this. I think some time in the next 5 to 6 years, the US currency is going to collapse. I really do. If you study all of history, history repeats itself over and over again. I think it's going to happen sometime. Do you know what? It's going to be a financial journey for everyone but it might be a spiritual journey for us too. It might teach us to rely more on what never fails than on what always fails.

Now, Israel also fellowshiped with God. Every time they came to a spot in the desert, they camped around the tabernacle so they pitched the tabernacle up and they would pitch their tents and we know from reading Scripture that they camped in a certain direction. So they put the tabernacle in the middle, certain tribes camped on top, certain on the left, certain on the right, certain on the bottom. They camped either to the north, west, east or south. Scripture tells us which tribes camped where and it tells us how many people were in each camp and if we go and draw all of that out, it forms the shape of a cross and so if you would have gone out on a mountainside at night and looked at the children of Israel camping and all the tents had lights in it and the Shekinah glory of God is shooting up out of the middle, you would have seen a giant, flaming cross at night. It's just pointing its way forward to Jesus Christ. Now, that's just kind of cool. But they fellowshiped with him.

They were right there where God was and they prayed to him and they worshiped him and they fellowshiped with him. They exalted in the fact that God was with them even though he wasn't with all the other nations. They exalted in his presence. And they were faithful. There are 40 years where they do murmur here once or twice but there is a 40 year period of time in Israel's history here where they are not going after other gods. Now, if you know the rest of Israel's history, you know that every time they got a little bit comfortable in life, they started going after other gods and they forgot the true God and they went into captivity and in the whole book of Judges this is happening over and over and over again. But they are faithful to him.

Then Israel was fervent toward God. Jeremiah 2:3 indicates that Israel was holiness to the Lord. They had consecrated themselves to him. When God is talking through the prophet Jeremiah in this passage, he is beginning with the spirit and putting them in mind of how they once were with him so that they can now realize their own fleshliness.

Now, let's take all those observations we just made about Israel and apply them to a new bride. New brides are lovely, aren't they? I've had the privilege of performing the weddings of some amazing young ladies and I just remember how radiant they look on that day and how beautiful that dress is and I still think that it was just a privilege to be a part of that. They're amazing. But have you ever watched a new bride right after the wedding? Now, without mentioning anybody that I've known that I've officiated at their ceremony and in watching them later, I will tell you that watching a couple that has just been married for at least the first four months after the wedding, will practically make you sick. I mean, they can't sit like normal people. You've got a loveseat and there's a little line between the cushions and they think they all have to be on the same cushion together and they don't know that you sometimes need your hand free to swat at a fly or to wave at your face. They are hand-in-hand constantly. They never take their hands away from one another and there can be 20 other people in the room and what are they doing? They're looking at each other the whole time. They are so focused. It's nauseating is what it is whenever you see it but that's the way it is because that's that new love and that's that new passion. There is a focus. A new bride focuses on her husband almost to the exclusion of everybody else.

Then she follows her husband. I remember when we got married, one week after we got married, Judy's parents left Arkansas and went back to Taiwan and it was 10,000 miles away and Judy is just left with me. By the way, if you need premarital counseling, do not go see our pastor, come and see me because he gave me one piece of premarital counseling. Let me repeat it for your benefit. It was a good piece of information but I really needed a bigger course than this. He told me, he says, "Now son, there are times that Judy is just going to cry and you're going to ask her what's wrong and she is going to say I don't know." He says, "Just go with it. You don't have to figure it out. Just be quiet and be there," and that was it, that was my entire premarital counseling. I found out later, I really should have read some books and had a course and probably had a mentor to get me through the process but that was the thing. But you know, Judy was willing to follow me to a little Podunk apartment in Jacksonville, Texas and then she was willing to follow me when we moved to Nacogdoches and she was willing to follow me wherever we went after that and we made a lot of moves. Melody has lost count of how many houses she lived in and yet Christiania now, how many was it, honey? 16 before she got married. There were a lot of moves. Judy followed me everywhere. I asked Judy one day before we got married, I could name some different places. I said, "Well, if God calls me there, would you go? If God calls me there, would you go?" There was no question in her mind. Wherever God calls, she was ready to go. Why, because a bride follows her husband, especially one that is newly in love.

Then she has faith in her husband to take care of her every need. Now, I've been married for 34 years and Judy still is the ultimate epitome of this, that whenever I get stressed out about things not working out and wondering how the future is going to be, Judy is just kind of like, "Ah, you and God will take care of it." My wife is not a worrier. She lets me do all the worrying for my family but she's not a worrier and she just trusts in it.

Then a new bride fellowships with her husband. Now, somebody told us and I hope this is a great piece of advice, that for at least the first year of your marriage, you should not have a television. Don't even have one in the house and I guess today we'd almost need to add computer screen to that. But anyway, at least don't have, today you'd have to say don't have a television or Netflix but don't have that for at least the first year. It was actually a number of years, finally someone in our congregation just thought it was a sin that the pastor didn't have a television and they gave us one and I wish they had never done that. It's an amazing thing. We didn't need it. Why? Because we talked. We read stuff together and we talked. We never have run out in 34 years, we've never really run out of stuff to talk about. Now, every time we go out on a date together, one of my daughters who shall remain nameless at the moment, thinks that it's impossible for us to have fun without her there. She thinks, she says, "It must be boring when we're not around." Well, the truth of the matter is, I like being with my wife by ourselves and we do have a good time.

Then a new bride faithfully loves her husband. She doesn't want anybody else. She is so consumed with him that thoughts of another man don't even enter her mind in those early stages of a marriage and then she fervently loves her husband. So Jeremiah is picturing for us, he's saying that the first love is the love that a new bride has for her husband and it's the love that Israel had for God while wandering in the wilderness.

Now we need to go back to Ephesus. You see, the Ephesian Christians are good people. They are diligent in their labor. They're despising of evil. They are discerning of truth. But they kind of have passed the honeymoon stage with Jesus. They are organized and scheduled, they have rituals and routines, they are comfortable in the status quo but they have lost their all-consuming focus on Christ. They have lost their faith. They have lost their fellowship. They have lost the fervor of their walk with Christ. The question I'd ask you today: where are you? What about you? Is the honeymoon over? You see, the groom, Jesus, is still crazy about us but sometimes we're so busy like Martha attending to things in the kitchen and doing activities and keeping up homeschooling and paying the bills and working a job that we don't, like Mary, sit down at the feet of Jesus and just spend time with the bridegroom. Does that describe you? I know it describes me.

Do we have a love that goes beyond the mere requirements of our relationship? And how do you know that you've lost your first love? So there are some notes in the back of your bulletin so you don't have to write these down but I wanted to look at some passages in the New Testament about love and figure out how would we know when we had lost our first love. The first thing, John 14:21 says, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he it is that love with me and he that will loves me, shall be loved by my father and I will love him and will manifest or show or reveal myself to him." So the very first thing he

says, "If you love God, you keep his commandments." Now Jesus during his lifetime, gave somewhere around 49 commandments that we have recorded in Scripture and he even says that if you want to be a disciple, he says that when you disciple people, what do you do? He says that you go and make disciples of all nations teaching them whatsoever things I have commanded you. He says, "Teach them my commands." So we've got to know what those commands are and we need to obey his commands and the degree to which we obey what Jesus commanded us to do is the degree to which people can see evidence of our love for him. You see, it's not about do's and don'ts and rules and regulations and legalism, there is nothing you can do that's going to make God love you any better than he already does. There is nothing you can do that's going to earn you greater favor in the future than he already does. It's all by his grace. It's all by his mercy. But if I love him, I want to please him. By the way, the greatest single parenting secret, moms and dads, that you will ever find is to so get the hearts of your children that you don't have to keep a big board on the wall or a big helping hand or a giant whip. You don't have to threaten them, you don't have to raise your voice, you don't have to yell at them, you just get their hearts so in touch with yours that the last thing they would ever want to do is disappoint daddy or mama and they obey because they love you. That's what we need to do.

Then secondly, you have lost your first love if you delight in the wrong things. There in Mark 12:30, did you notice that the first thing he says is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Our greatest desire shouldn't be for comfort or affluence or a big bank account or a new relationship, our greatest desire ought to be for Jesus.

Here's another one, if you do not crave time with God, Mark 12:30 it says, "and all your soul." That's your mind, your will and emotions. It's where you think, where you feel, where you make decisions. You should have a mental and emotional craving to spend time with God.

Here's another evidence: if your leisure thoughts are not on God. Now, leisure thoughts are those things that your mind goes back to when you're not busy doing something else. We can't all multitask ten things at one time and I'm definitely not really a multitasker. You probably don't believe that knowing how many things I'm involved in but I really prefer to have one thing to do at a time, focus on one thing, get it done and then move to the next thing. I do like moving very fast from one thing to another but I hate having multiple projects at the same time. It drives me insane. But when you have a spare moment and I know for some of us that is delusional thinking but when our brain isn't occupied on some other task, what does it come back to? To be quite honest, mine often comes back to economics, finances, how I can invest for the future. I think way too much about that. What should it come back to? It ought to come back to think on the Lord and how gracious he is toward us. Psalm 10:4 says, "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." Are you like that? Does God really not have a whole lot of time in your brain until you get to church on Sunday? Think about Psalm 10:4.

Here's another one, you've lost your first love if you claim to only be human and then you go ahead and give into sin. Now, you've done this. You don't have to raise your hand. I know that some time in your life there's probably been a piece of chocolate cake that you stared at and thought, "Well, I shouldn't eat that," but you said, "I'm only human." Or you know that there's something that's not that edifying but you say, "I'm going to watch it anyway because I'm tired and I'm only human." In other words, we make excuses for things but he says we're to love the Lord our God not only with all our mind and all our heart and all our soul but then he says all our strength. Not all our weaknesses but all our strength. We're to give him the strength that says that we're going to serve him regardless. We're not going to give into human weaknesses. John 15:10, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love." He says, "Listen, I'm the example. You obey me like I obey my Father." John 14:15, "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

Here's another one: you've lost your first love if you don't willingly and cheerfully give to God's work that includes both his church but it also includes the needs of others. 1 John 3:17, John said it this way, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" And we could ask ourselves the same thing, do we support his church? We're told on the first day of the week to set aside in proportion to how God has given us to benefit the local church. Why? Because they support missionaries. They support benevolence. We need to be a part of that and we're to give in proportion.

Here's another one, if you do not treat every Christian like you would the Lord. Now, if the Lord came to your house for dinner, how would you treat them? Would you honor him? How do you treat other Christians? Do you honor them? Do you respect them? Do you enjoy being around with them? Do you show them? Do you demonstrate that they are important to you. Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, "The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." He says, treat them like you'd treat the King. Treat your brother like you'd treat the King. John 13:34, this is Jesus. I know we don't like the word "command" because we instantly think rules but Jesus didn't give us commands to make us miserable, he gave us commands to experience blessing. He says this, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." So you must love one another.

Here's another evidence: when you just wrongly view Christ's commands. You think that he is just being a cosmic killjoy who is out to make you miserable, you're missing the point. It's not about rules, it's not about regulations, it's about understanding that God in his infinite love for us has explained to us how life works and if we put his principles into action, life really works. It really works. We're not to obey him out of compulsion but out of love. You see, the problem is when we're bucking up against obeying Christ, it's not because he's a mean taskmaster, it's because we just don't love him like we ought to.

Here's another one: if you look more for the world's approval than God's. If you are more concerned about what people think than what God thinks. 1 John 2:15, he says, "Love not

the world nor anything that's in the world for all that is of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." He says, "If you love the world, the love of the Father isn't in you." John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." Don't be surprised if when you're radically different for Christ and you're raising your kids a different way, you're conducting your marriage a different way, you're spending your money a different way, one day they look at you and think, "You're weird."

Here's another one: if you fail to make Christ and his words known. I worry sometimes, "What is So-and-so going to think if I share Christ with them?" But what does it say in John 15:20? "Remember the words I spoke to you, no servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they would obey yours also." He says, "Listen, just share. Share the news. People need to know about me. You need to share it."

Here's one more: that is, if you refuse to give up an activity that's weakening another brother. Romans 14:15 says, "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you're no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died." You may feel the freedom to engage in certain activities but don't impose that on them. I do not have a freedom in my spirit to drink because I used to drink. I wasted plenty of brain cells that I wished I hadn't now. My parents permitted drinking in moderation so I indulged in it to excess. I don't want that for my life. I don't really want it for my kids lives. But I was at a wedding a number of years ago just outside of Los Angeles and after the wedding, we all went and had a wedding banquet at a restaurant and the bride was from Canada and the groom was from Australia but the groom wisely came to me and he said, "Now, we want to toast each other here. Is that going to be a problem for you?" I said, "I appreciate you asking. Would you give my wife and I some iced tea and we'll toast you." Now, I didn't have to be condemning of what they were doing and he was being sensitive to what I was doing but had he known that I really had a problem with that and if he did it anyhow and it caused me to fail, he would not be demonstrating the love of Christ. So we need to make sure. Make sure that you aren't engaged in an activity that's causing somebody else to stumble.

Now, another thing is that you just get complacent to sin going on around you and you think it's perfectly normal so you allow it all the time. Matthew 24:12 he says, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."

Then finally, you're unable to forgive others who have offended you. 1 John 4:20, he says, "If anyone says I love God and yet he hates his brother, he is a liar for anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." Yet sometimes we're just really ticked off at somebody to the point that we're better against them so that we think about, "I wish something bad would happen to them." Sometimes we even plot, sometimes we even tell God, "Now God, if I was God, I'd be doing this to them." Why? Because we were offended.

Let me ask you a question: why do you think we lose our first love? Well, one is that we just become worldly. The Nicolaitans were talking about if you have grace, go ahead and sin because, after all, your ticket is bought and you might as well enjoy life while you're here. They had a wrong idea of enjoyment, by the way. Real enjoyment is just seeing what an amazing life God has for you living it his way. It's amazing. And the Bible does say that friendship with the world is enmity against God.

Then another thing is that we just forget we need God daily. God sent the manna down during that 40 years of wilderness wandering on a daily basis because he wanted them to remember every single day that they needed him. They needed God. Love is based in part on need. I need my wife. She meets needs that no other person on this planet can meet and she needs me. We have a need for one another and in the same way, we need to recognize every day that we can't get through life without God today and we forget that sometimes. Now, there were a group of people who were told to go into the Promised Land and they said, "Oh, we went over there. We spied. It is an amazing place. Look at these grapes we brought back." It took two people to carry them on a pole. That's how big the grape clusters were. He says, "But do you know what? We're like grasshoppers in their eyes. If we go in there, we're going to get whooped up one side and down the other." So he said, "You know, we just can't go." In other words, what was their big problem? They were trusting in their own strength and their own strength was inadequate and it was 40 years later before their kids went into the Promised Land trusting in the strength of God and the walls of Jericho fell down. We forget that we have that daily need.

Now, what can we do to keep our first love? I don't know that I have the answer to all this. I think there are some things. Sometimes I think maybe fasting would be a better idea than feasting. We eat in Fellowship Hall every Sunday and that's great but maybe we need to have a Sunday without the eating and we stopped feasting and we start fasting because it kind of turns down our fleshly impulses for a few days so that we can really focus on God. Remember, that's what the bride does to her husband. She focuses on him. It's what Israel did in the wilderness. They focused on the Shekinah glory of God. It's what we need to do to have revival is to focus on Jesus Christ.

Then prayer. I must confess that sometimes I get so caught up in thinking about God's provision that I forget to think about the fact that God is the Provider. You get so busy thinking about how you're going to retire and how you're going to support your family and how are you going to pay for school and if you've got six daughters, you wake up in a big sweat every morning and think, "How am I going to pay for the weddings?" Yet you forget who the Provider is. Don't think about the provision, focus on the Provider.

Then I think we need to learn to give sacrificially, not just give the little \$50 or the \$100 that we're able to give or maybe just give the tithe which is a wonderful reminder that everything comes from God and it's the beginning. It teaches us the fear of the Lord and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But sometimes give to where it hurts and then watch God meet our needs after we do that.

Now, Jesus ends every letter like this, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In other words, I'm about to say something you'd better really listen to. I haven't used this phrase but I think I'm going to start using it at home but I want you to notice first of all that he says that the need for repentance is urgent. What does he say? He says, "If you don't do this, you're going to lose your church. I'm going to remove the lampstand. There won't be a place of worship anymore." The church that loses its love for Christ loses its light to the world. The marriage that loses its first love, loses its witness to others. The Christian that loses his love for the Lord, loses their testimony.

So what do we do to restore our first love? Jesus tells us. He says, number 1: remember. Remember grace. He says, "Remember the heights from which you are fallen." Literally in Greek he says, "Keep on remembering. Think every day about how far you've come since I redeemed you." Everybody take just a moment, do a little mental exercise with me: imagine if you can, where you would be today if you had never known Jesus Christ. Think about that.

I was in the car with a daughter yesterday and she commented that the more she understood other religions in the world, the more she was grateful that God had allowed her to grow up in a Christian home and hear the Gospel at an early age and that she didn't have to work for God's favor because he simply loved her and gave her his grace. Where would you be without that love? Where would you be without that grace? I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be here today. I'm pretty sure I would have drank my way into another drunken stupor like I used to do and then I'd have gotten in a hot rod and gone too fast and gone around some curve and flipped the car three or four times and I'd be a grease spot on the side of the road. I certainly wouldn't be here and I've got to tell you, I love my wife. Now, there are moments that aren't that great but I love my wife and I wouldn't trade my family for anything.

"Remember the height from which you were fallen. Keep remembering the depths from which he has rescued you and rekindle your first love." I think he's also saying, when he says remember the heights, he's saying, "Remember what that love after you were first married felt like and find it again. Remember what it was like when you first came to know me and you were so excited that you had to tell everybody." I remember when Melody was five years old and she asked Jesus in her heart and we lived in an apartment complex off of Skillman Avenue in 635 N. Dallas and she immediately wanted to call everybody she knew in her family and find out if they knew Jesus too. She was asking my mom if she knew Jesus and she was asking neighbors if they knew Jesus. I remember this went really well because most of the people we knew knew Jesus and then she came in one day and she was just crestfallen because she had talked to a little Muslim boy and she says, "He just believes that Jesus was a good person but he doesn't know that he's God." My little five-year-old daughter was crestfallen but that was the passion she had to make sure that other people knew her Savior. Well, we need to be like that again, don't we?

Then what does Jesus say next? He says, "Repent and do it now." In Greek there is a certain kind of verb called an aorist verb and when you use an aorist imperative, it means

"do it now." Do it now. Do it now. Not just a continual kind of thing but right now, repent. Do it now. Jesus says, "Repent and do it now." Why? Because if you don't do it now, you'll get complacent. So in just a minute, Richard is going to come up here and he's going to lead us in a song and Janet is going to be over here playing and if you are convicted of the fact that you have lost your first love, my advice to you is what Jesus says, "Repent and do it now." You need to get up here with me on my knees, on your knees and repent of losing our first love. Do you realize how important it is? He says if we go away and we don't do it, we don't do business with God, we'll get complacent again, we'll get comfortable again, we'll forfeit some heavenly rewards because we didn't do the things that we should do and then ultimately we could lose our church. Now, there might still be a building here. This church has been around for 161 years and there will probably still be a building but what's the point in coming to the building if Jesus isn't here when we get here?

Then lastly he says this, "Repeat the first works. Repeat the first works. Do the work you did at first." In other words, go back to doing that bride thing. Now, when Judy and I were in that first apartment, we were so poor most of the time we didn't have two nickels to rub together and I got a job working the graveyard shift at a mental hospital. I know, it rubbed off on me, you can tell. But I worked from 10 PM to 6 AM at the mental hospital, came home dead tired from being up all night long and I had Greek class at 8 o'clock and the fact is, I stayed most of my Greek class, I leaned up against a brick wall because if I sat down, I was a goner. So I stood at the back of the class for three hours doing Greek while standing but I remember the thing I looked forward to the most was I knew that when I got home and I opened the door to our apartment that standing behind that door at 6:15 in the morning would be my lovely wife with a glass of iced tea in her hand. She did that every single day and actually, Judy, I think if you go back to getting up at six and having a drink ready for me, that would be an awesome plan. We'll work on that.

But I remember what a treasure that thing was. That was that first works. He says, "Go back and do the kind of things you did when you were very first crazy nuts, head-over-heels in love with Jesus." Maybe that's prayer and Bible reading and meditation on Scripture and witnessing. I don't know what it is. I would say to you guys, if you really want to impress your wife, start opening the car door for them again. I do that halfway sometimes. I'm usually pretty good about opening the door but I know my wife thinks it's important if I stay there until she gets in and then close the door. The problem is, some days I don't have that much endurance. You know, I could be standing a long time, okay? Waiting for her because people stop her and she talks and I'm by the car door and there was a day in my life that I could stand 20 minutes by a car door. I don't do it too well anymore. But anyway, go back and open a car door for them again and go over and pull the chair out for them again. Fix them a glass of iced tea when he comes home again.

But for Jesus, go back and give to him and witness for him and love him and talk to him and listen to him like you once did. What does Jesus promise if we do this? He says, "I will reward your faithfulness. If you overcome," what? "Then I'll make sure you're continually fed. I'll meet all your needs. You'll have access to the tree of life." Let me explain something: there is a tree of life and when we get to heaven, John describes later

in Revelation that when we get to that golden city, the new heaven that comes down or the new city that comes down out of heaven and comes to earth, the new Jerusalem and it talks about the street of gold and it talks about the river that runs through the city and it talks about the trees that have 12 different kinds of fruit that are for the healing of the nations. It has all this fabulous stuff going on and we look at that and say, "Man," and the tree of life is going to be accessible again for the first time since Adam and Eve were banned from it. I can't even imagine yet what that's going to be like but in the midst of all of that, he says, "You don't have to wait to get to heaven to have abundant life." John says in 1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you that believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have," you have right now, "eternal life."

So here's my question as Richard comes: have you left your first love? If we could take this screen up here and run a videotape of your life for the last 30 days and watch it, what evidence would there be of your love for Christ? Or could we watch it for 30 days and say, "Yup, it happened to you too. You lost your first love." Do you know what? We're never going to watch that videotape but if we're really honest with ourselves, Jesus Christ has already seen that video and he knows exactly where we're at.

Would you stand with me please? I want you to know that as a pastor, I don't keep records of how many people come up and if I'm the only one that's convicted by a sermon, then I'm the only one that needs to be at the altar but I also want to say to you that if you've lost your first love, the reason that God, I think, led us to these letters to the seven churches is because in these letters are some problems that maybe we have and we need to deal with them if God is going to bless us and he says this to you this morning, "Repent now and do the first works." I'm going to be up here repenting, I hope you'll join me.

Richard.

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Review

3 **How churches must grow**

- A church must first grow spiritually, then numerically, then financially.
 - That won't happen by virtue of who is on the staff.
 - God does it. Expect everything from him and nothing from me and you won't be disappointed.

4 **The essential quality**

- The fact of the matter is that there is ONE necessary thing – one sterling qualification which this church must have in order to survive
 - GENUINE LOVE for Jesus Christ
 - GENUINE LOVE for one another
 - GENUINE LOVE for all those to whom we have opportunity to minister

5 **The Ephesians greatest need**

- Paul prayed for the Ephesians to:
 - Be strengthened with might by God's Spirit
 - Have a deep fellowship with Christ
 - Be rooted and grounded in LOVE
 - To know the breadth of God's LOVE
 - To know the depth of God's LOVE
 - To know the height of God's LOVE
 - To intimately experience the LOVE of Christ that surpasses all other knowledge
 - To be filled with the fullness of God

6 **The Ephesians missed it**

- They focused on dealing with life's stresses
 - A society that shunned them
 - Economic difficulties
 - The business of daily life
- They focused more on organization and activities than on worship
- Now 43 years after Paul had been at Ephesus, Jesus has something to say against them

7 **Revelation 2:1-2**

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

8 **Revelation 2:3-5**

You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you

and remove your lampstand from its place.

9 **Revelation 2:6-7**

But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices 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 give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

10 **The LORD commends the Laborers**

11 **What the Ephesian church did right**

- They were diligent for God:
 - work (individual projects for God)
 - labor (a continuing pattern of life-long service)
 - patience (an unswerving faithfulness)
- They were despising of evil
- They were discerning of truth
 - Against false teachers
 - Against the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (those who promote and practice compromise with the world)
-

12 **The LORD rebukes the Laborers**

13 **You have lost your first love**

- ESV - *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*
 - Our love for Christ should be growing in such a way that we should never be able to look back to a time when we loved Him more.
 - There is a beautiful picture of a “first love” for God in Jeremiah 2:1-2

14 **A love that goes beyond the requirements**

15 **Jeremiah 2:1-2**

- KJV -- *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.*
- God remembers the “loving-kindness” (ἔρως) of Israel in the wilderness
 - This word is typically only used of God’s love toward us, but here Israel is reflecting that love back to Him

16 **Jeremiah 2:1-2**

- ESV
 - *The word of the LORD came to me: "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.'"*

17 **God as husband to Israel**

18 **What is this love?**

- In Jeremiah 2:1-2, the Lord refers to a specific time when Israel followed His Shekinah presence through the wilderness.
 - For 40 years Israel followed God. They had a brief moment of murmuring during that time, but for the most part, they simply got up every morning and went wherever God's presence took them.
 - It was in a wilderness with no planted crops, no vineyards, sometimes no water.

19 **But in the wilderness...**

- God led them – day and night by the Shekinah presence; their focus was on Him
- God fed them
 - *Facts of Wonder* (Bruce Wilkerson)
 - 3 million people marching in a parade 40 miles long (50 abreast), taking two days to cross the Red Sea
 - Required 160 boxcars of food and 1000 tank cars of water daily -- a train 9-1/2 miles long daily (see 1 Corinthians 10:4)

20 **But in the wilderness (2)**

- God clothed them
 - Their shoes did not fall apart
 - Their clothes lasted
- God protected them

21 **Israel loved God in the wilderness**

- Israel FOCUSED on God (His Shekinah presence)
- Israel FOLLOWED God without question (not knowing where they were going)
- Israel had FAITH in God to supply all their need
 - Deuteronomy 2:6 – They did sometimes purchase goods during the wanderings, but their worldly goods were being depleted for 40 years while their faith in God grew

22 **Israel loved God in the wilderness**

- Israel FELLOWSHIPED with God
 - They encamped around the Tabernacle
 - They prayed to Him and communed with Him
 - They exalted in His presence with them
- Israel was FAITHFUL to God
 - During this time, they did not turn their hearts toward other gods
- Israel was FERVENT toward God
 - Jeremiah 2:3 indicates that Israel consecrated themselves to the Lord in fervent commitment

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25 **A new bride**

- FOCUSES on her husband

- FOLLOWS her husband – sometimes a long way from home
- Has FAITH in her husband to take care of her every need
- FELLOWSHIPS with her husband – would rather talk with him than watch TV
- FAITHFULLY loves her husband – wants no one else
- FERVENTLY loves her husband

26 **Back to Ephesus**

- The Ephesian Christians are good people:
 - Diligent in labor
 - Despising of evil
 - Discerning of truth
- But their honeymoon with Jesus is over
 - They are organized and scheduled
 - They have ritual and routine
 - They are comfortable in the *status quo*
 - But they have lost their primary FOCUS, FOLLOWING, FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, and FERVOR

27 **How do you know that you have left your first love?**

28 **1. Disobeying His commandments**

- Jesus said (John 14:21) -- "*Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.*" I
 - The evidence of our love can be seen in obedience to His commandments.
 - The loss of our love can be seen in disobedience to His commandments.

29 **2. You delight is in the wrong thing**

- Your delight in the Lord is no longer as great as your delight in someone or something else.
- Mark 12:30 -- "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*"
- ALL OUR HEART -- Our greatest desire should be for Him!

30 **You so not crave time with God**

- You spend time with God in the Word and in prayer
- Mark 12:30 ALL OUR SOUL (mind, will, emotions) means that we have a mental and emotional craving to spend time with His Word so that He can feed us.

31 **Your leisure thoughts are not on God**

- Mark 12:30 ALL OUR MIND means our individual thoughts. What do you most naturally think about when you have free time?
- Psalm 10:4 -- "*In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*"
 - The proud or wicked person has no room in his leisure thoughts for God. Are you leaving less and less room for Him?

- 32 **You claim to be "only human" and give in to sin**
- Mark 12:30 ALL OUR STRENGTH. (Not ALL OUR HUMAN WEAKNESS.)
 - John 15:10 -- *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.*
 - John 14:15 -- *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*
- 33 **You do not willingly and cheerfully give to God's work**
- This includes the needs of others.
 - 1 John 3:17 -- *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*
 - We are to regularly support our church.
 - 2 Corinthians 8 – First give yourselves to the Lord and then give of the resources He entrusted to you.
 - You are giving to support the Lord's work.
- 34 **You do not treat every Christian as you would the Lord**
- Matthew 25:40 -- *The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*
 - John 13:34 -- *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. So you must love one another.*
- 35 **When you wrongly view Christ's commands**
- Many view Christ's commands as restrictions to their happiness rather than expressions of His love.
 - John 14:21 clearly shows the relationship between our love for Christ and keeping His commandments. We are to obey Him not out of compulsion but out of love.
- 36 **You strive for the world's approval instead of God's.**
- 1 John 2:15 -- *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
 - John 15:19 -- *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."*
- 37 **You fail to make Christ or His words known**
- This failure is because you fear rejection. John 15:20 – *Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*
- 38 **You refuse to give up an activity that offends a weaker brother.**
- Romans 14:15 -- *If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*
- 39 **You become complacent to sinful conditions around you.**
- Matthew 24:12 -- *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.*
- 40 **You are unable to forgive another for offending you.**
- 1John 4:20 -- *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

41 **Why do we lose our first love?**

42 **1. We become worldly**

- The doctrine of the Nicolaitans misled people to believe they could sin and be worldly without it affecting their relationship to Christ.
- But friendship with the world is enmity with God.

43 **2. We forget our daily need of God**

- Picture the nation of Israel during their stay in the wilderness.
 - Those who relied on their own strength instead of God's refused to go into the Promised Land. These people later took the manna for granted, grumbled, and died in the wilderness.
 - The next generation depended on God for sustenance and for salvation (the snake on the pole). These people entered the Promised Land aware of their need of God and were thus able to conquer Jericho.

44 **How do we keep our first love?**

- Fasting
 - "Turns down" the volume of our fleshly desires and gives us time and focus for the Lord
- Prayer
 - Focuses attention on the Provider instead of the Provision
- Giving sacrificially
 - This is Philippian-style partnership giving – they gave beyond their ability
 - It helps us to remember that we need God.

45 **He who has ears, let him hear!**

46 **The URGENT need of repentance**

- We'll lose the church if we do not keep the First Love.
 - The church that loses its love will lose its light.
 - The marriage that loses its first love will lose its light.
 - The Christian that loses its love will lose his/her light.
- How can we restore our First Love?

47 **REMEMBER grace**

- 1. Remember the heights from which you have fallen
 - Literally "keep on remembering."
 - We must keep remembering from what depths the Lord rescued us.
 - We must also keep remembering what we have lost and cultivate a desire to once again rekindle our first love – to have close intimate fellowship with the Lord.

48 **REPENT and do it now!**

- Repent -- an aorist imperative that means DO IT NOW. Will you ask God to forgive you today for leaving your First Love?
- Jesus stresses the urgency of repenting now. Why is so important that we need to do it

NOW?

- Because we'll forget and grow complacent again.
- The world will crowd out our conviction.
- We stay the same and lose heavenly rewards.

49 **REPEAT the first works**

- "Do the works you did at the first"
 - Start NOW (aorist) doing the first works.
 - Commit to Him all those things which are broken and neglected as a result of losing your first love:
 - Prayer
 - Bible reading
 - Meditation
 - Obedient service
 - Worship

50 **Jesus rewards a faithful love**

- IF you overcome, and IF you repent of the loss of your First Love. . .
 - THEN you are continually fed by the Lord.
 - He meets all your needs in order for you to grow into the image of Christ.
- Sin banned mankind from the Tree of Life.
 - But in Christ we have eternal abundant life. The problem is that most of us act like we have to get to heaven to enjoy an abundant life. (See 1 John 5:13)

51 **Ponder for a moment...**

- Have you left your first love? Are some of the evidences of this leaving present in your life?
- Do you realize how important it is that we repent of this leaving?
 - If we don't we could lose our church.
 - There may still be a building here and maybe even a meeting.
 - But we won't have the presence of God in our midst. He will remove the candlestick.

52 **A moment of honesty**

- If we could put the last 30 days of your life on a video this afternoon and watch it, would it show that you loved Christ with complete abandon? Or would it show that you have lost your first love?
- Do you want to be daily fed by the tree of Life? Don't you want to have your inmost needs met--your emotional, spiritual, and mental needs--by a living Savior?
- Do you want to be more aware of His presence in your daily life?
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