

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

**COMMENDATION
CRITICISM**

**INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION
PROMISE**

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

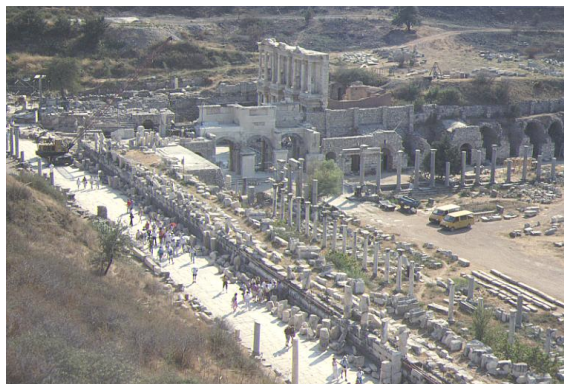
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
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GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
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Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. **Labor** is never a substitute for **love**. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

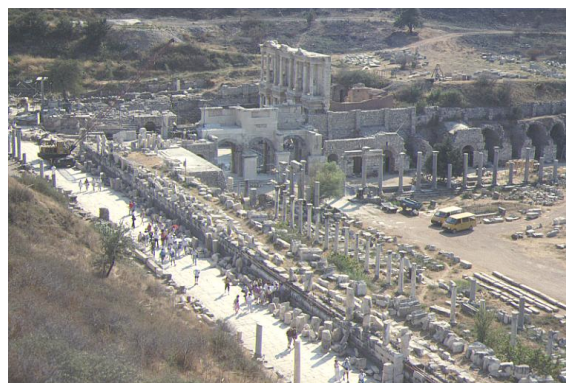
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. **Labor** is never a substitute for **love**. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

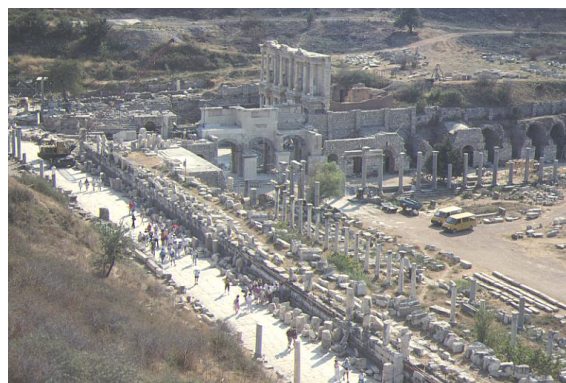
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

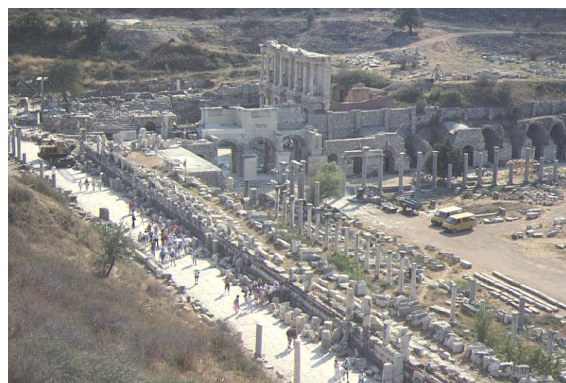
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. **Labor** is never a substitute for **love**. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

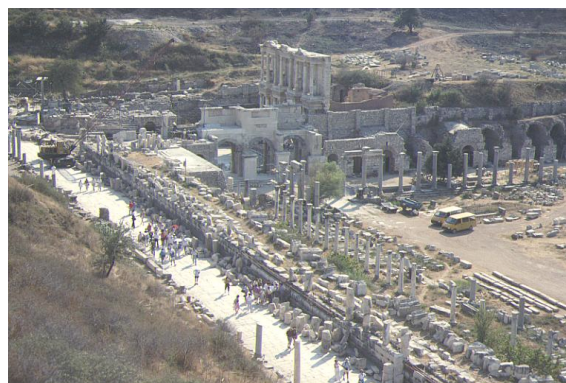
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

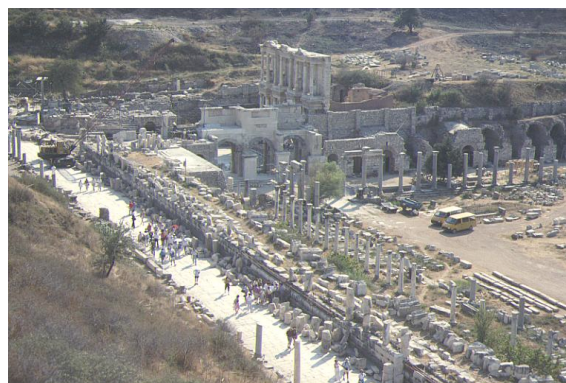
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

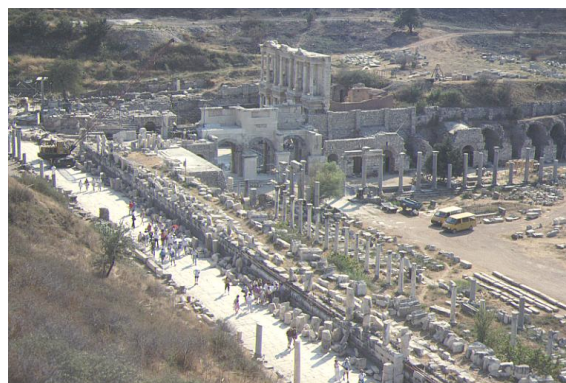
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

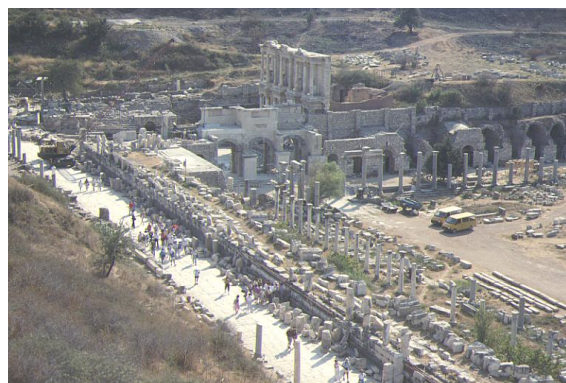
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatian**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. **Labor** is never a substitute for **love**. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

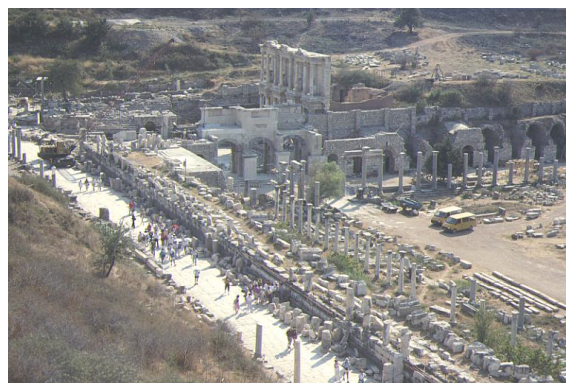
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“**remember**” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatian**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

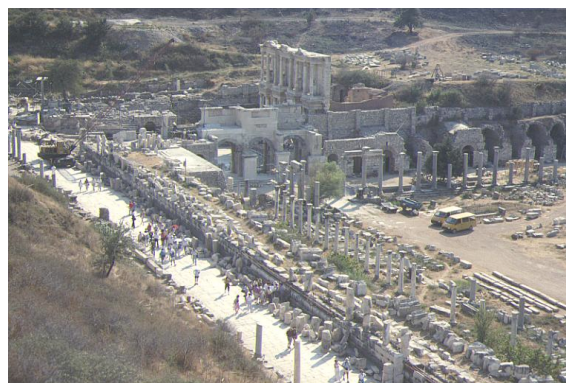
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

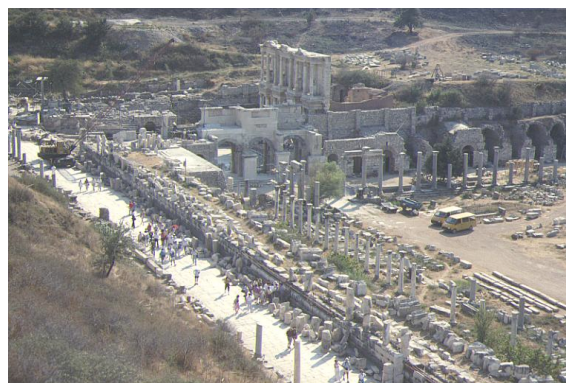
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

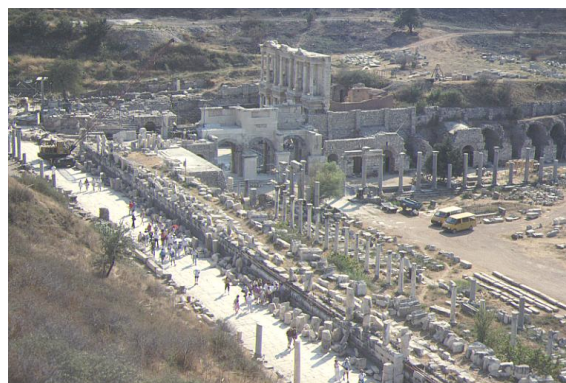
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. **Labor** is never a substitute for **love**. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

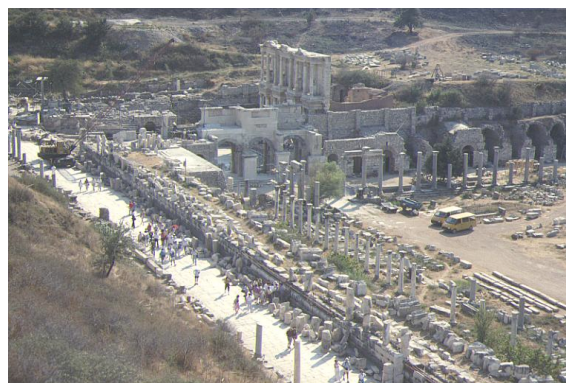
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

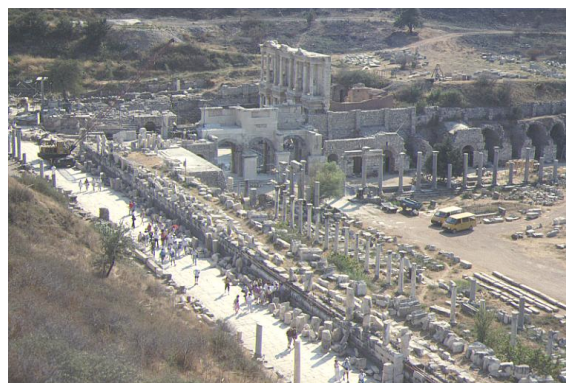
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 1 | THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS ... THE LOVELESS CHURCH
REVELATION 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
GREGG LAMM | lead pastor-teacher
www.2ndstreet.org

Remember the song “*Get Back*”, by the Beatles? I heard its catch-phrase a lot growing up. “**GET BACK** from the edge of that curb!” “**GET BACK** up to this table!” “**GET BACK OUT** there and finish raking those leaves.” I was a wanderer. But the main line that’s repeated over and over in the song is “*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*” And I think Lennon and McCartney hit a chord in all of us when they wrote those words because we’ve all left **SOMEONE** or **SOMETHING** that we wished we’d hung onto.

When I was 19 years old I bought a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. Sure, the left side was smashed in and I had to climb in on the passenger side. Sure, the top was torn. Sure the exhaust system was shot. Sure, it had a crack in the front window that went off in 100 directions. Sure, it had two different colored front fenders. But it didn’t matter. I was in love from the moment I saw it. I thought about it’s **potential** —not it’s **present state**.

I thought about the stereo I’d put **in** it, the tires and wheels I’d put **on** it, and the dates I’d have **with** it. It took two years, but by the time I was a Junior it was cherried-out with brushed aluminum honey-comb spoked wheels, and 70 series tires. The stereo with an amp and 4 speakers had been installed. A new top had been installed, along with a new front windshield. And in August of 1979 Mike Cain and I painted it “Porsche Racing Red”. Do you get the point that I **loved** that car? But then one day in 1980 I got into a pinch financially and sold it —for a lot less than I had into it. I was desperate. I didn’t see any other way out. I loved that car, but I let it go.

I think a lot of you can relate —you’ve sold a car, or a musical instrument, a basketball card, a concert ticket, or something more valuable —that now, you wished you’d held onto. And it can be the same with relationships too ... we get out of them when the going gets tough, oftentimes without checking out all our options. With a spouse, with parents, with brothers and sisters, with friends, or with boyfriends or girlfriends. Somebody lets us down, or we get mad, or we let them down, and we feel ashamed ... and we give up, or we just let it slip through our fingers.

In **REVELATION 2** there’s a letter that speaks to the issue of leaving **something**, or **someone** we love. It’s a letter Jesus wrote to the folks who made up the church at Ephesus. And the challenge Jesus lays out is one **that you and I** need to hear. And so in this day of instant decisions and quick rejections that often cost us more than we ever dreamed, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to **REVELATION 2:1-7**.

Have you ever read somebody else’s mail? Tell the truth! Sometimes I don’t want to read **my own mail** but the thought of reading somebody else’s? Now that’s intriguing! But, just to let you know —it’s a Felony Offense, so I’m not advocating it!

When we read this letter in **REVELATION 2** we need to remember that we're not really reading someone else's mail, because Jesus was writing the words of this letter for ***each of us too***. And so this morning it's a letter that's in each of our mailboxes — and we have the privilege of opening it up and reading it, and studying it together.

Like the man George Fox said about 350 years ago, “**The church is the people, not the steeple.**” The **church is you and it's me**. And Jesus Christ's words have as much relevance to us as 2nd Street Community Church today as they did to the church at Ephesus two thousand years ago. Because in these seven verses Jesus asks us to think back and remember Him ... and to recommit to making Him **our first love**.

REVELATION 2:7a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Gang, if there was ever an admonition from the WORD of God that you and I need to be attentive, it's this one ... that **we learn to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to us**. We work so hard at planning our lives and our relationships. We plan everything out. And then we solicit the aid of the LORD to help us implement our plans. Ever had a conversation with God that went something like this?

“God, how about it? Would You mind giving me a hand? I've got it all figured out —all You have to do is make my plan work.”

When we talk with God like this, we've made a tragic mistake. God has a **PLAN**, and a **FUTURE**, and a **HOPE** for each one of us. But we've got to listen to Him to discover it, and then live it out one day at a time. God doesn't have a “one size fits all” kind of plan. He has a plan for **YOU**. For **YOU** personally. And for **ME** personally. And for **OUR CHURCH** personally. And so instead of implementing a program, and then asking God to help us do our thing, we need to wait on God and discover His plans for us. Each of us needs to find the flow of God's Holy Spirit and then move in that flow. Here's a simple outline for *The New Testament* book of **REVELATION** ...

REVELATION 1
REVELATION 2-3
REVELATION 4-22

FOCUSES ON PAST EVENTS
FOCUSES ON PRESENT EVENTS
FOCUSES ON FUTURE EVENTS

So this morning, as we begin this study of the **REVELATION 2-3**, and an in-depth study of the seven letters Jesus had the Apostle John write out and distribute to the seven churches in Asia Minor (now modern-day Turkey), we're dealing with **PRESENT EVENTS**. John was writing to teach churches about the stuff they were going through right then. Here's a map of where these seven churches were located ...

JPG MAP OF ASIA MINOR (MODERN-DAY TURKEY) ...



As Jesus speaks to each church there's a huge variety to what He says. But for the **MOST PART** Jesus gives each of these churches, and ultimately to us as the flock called 2nd Street in Newberg, Oregon in 2009 the following kinds of information ...

JESUS GIVES THESE CHUCHES ...

COMMENDATION

CRITICISM

INSTRUCTION or CORRECTION

PROMISE

WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT

WHAT WE'RE DOING WRONG

HOW WE CAN MAKE CHANGES

THE FRUIT OF THESE CHANGES

Let me give you a little background about the church at Ephesus. When Jesus had the Apostle John write down and deliver this letter, the church at Ephesus was one of the strongest churches around. It was founded by Apollos around 60 A.D. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church (which we'll begin studying this coming Spring) was written in about 64 A.D. —and then, about 32 years later ... in about 96 A.D. Jesus writes this letter to them —through the pen of 98 year old Apostle John, who's been exiled by Rome and is living out his sentence on the penal Island of Patmos.

In **ACTS 19-21**, there's an amazing story about a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were friends of the Apostle Paul. After hearing a disciple named Apollos preach, they realized that Apollos had only heard the **MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE** of John the Baptist, didn't know much about Jesus. And since he'd only heard part of the story Aquila and Priscilla shared the story of Jesus with him, and Apollos put his faith into Jesus Christ ... and the church he planted in the town of Ephesus flourished.

Not too much later, the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and stayed for three years, really grounding them in the truth through solid teaching. And when Paul eventually turned the task of pastoring and teaching the flock in Ephesus over to his disciple Timothy, it had grown to around 25,000 folks. That's solid growth.

But even though the church at Ephesus was once one of the most powerful, on-fire churches, when Jesus wrote this letter to them, they'd somehow forgotten about Him **as their first love**. They have an active program —in fact, they have lots of programs —but they're in trouble. They even go out and witness. They have Bible Studies and prayer meetings. But the problem is that they're doing all these **SPIRITUAL WORKS** out of a sense of **duty** instead of out of **love**. And so while they're outwardly strong, they're inwardly lean and dying. And I see an important **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

WHAT we do for the LORD is important, but so is **WHY** we do it! We can't measure our spiritual maturity by **WHAT** or by **HOW MUCH** we're doing for God. *Labor* is never a substitute for *love*. As followers of Jesus Christ we have to have both.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul writes about this in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹ I may speak in different languages of people or even angels. But if I do not have love, I am only a noisy bell or a crashing cymbal.

² I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing.

³ I may give away everything I have, and I may even give my body as an offering to be burned. But I gain nothing if I do not have love.

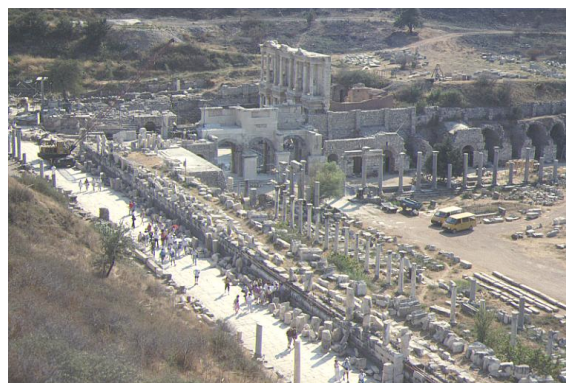
Do you see it? When we forsake Jesus Christ as our **first love**, it nullifies all the other things we're trying to accomplish in His name.

REVELATION 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Greek word **angel** literally means **messenger**. Jesus was writing this letter to whoever **represented the Ephesian church** ... to the **pastor**, the **shepherd**, or the **teacher**, knowing that they would **pass on** it on to the sheep in the flock. So in other words, I'm the **angel** in the story today. Sorry if that's a let down to some of you. I know you thought angels looked ... well ... at least ... different than me. I guess I'm kind of like Clarence, the angel George Bailey got in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

JPG OF EPHESUS NOW ...



Ephesus is on near the East side of the Mediterranean coast, and it's a pretty miserable village today. But in its day, it was a well-known city, famous for its cultural achievements. It was at the mouth of several rivers, so it was a center of trade and commerce. Everyone sent their stuff down the river and then met there to sell and trade their goods ... lots of multi-level marketing going on in Ephesus. Oh ya. In fact, Ephesus is probably where **AMWAY** and **TIME-SHARES** both got started.

The **seven golden lampstands** spoken of in **v. 1** are the seven churches receiving these letters. And again, like the word **angels**, the **seven stars** refer to the **messengers** or **pastor-teachers** of the churches. And finally, the **One** spoken of here in **v. 1** is **Jesus**. And where is He? I love what Jesus says He's **among** us. He's not **beside**, **outside**, or **behind** us, He's **inside us**, **among us**, right **in the middle** of us.

REVELATION 2:2-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

³ **and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.**

Let's put ourselves into this narrative. Maybe you're here this morning and you're in this exact same position as the folks in Ephesus. Maybe you've done a lot of **deeds** for God. Maybe you've **toiled** and **persevered** for God. Maybe you have a sense of **right** and **wrong**, and even **good** and **evil**. Maybe you know **true** from **false** and maybe you've even **endured** and **persevered** in the name of Jesus and not given up.

Maybe you have all **THE OUTWARD ACTIONS** of a person who is "**in Christ**" —and yet as you look at yourself right now ... right this minute ... and as you evaluate your motivations ... you realize that you've been coming to God and serving God out of a sense of **duty** rather than because He's your **first love**. Maybe you've been hoping that your service and your ministry would **make you acceptable to God** —instead of believing the Truth —that **God already accepts you unconditionally**.

Gang, the people in the church at Ephesus started out right —they loved Jesus and they wanted their ministry to be done because of that love. But somewhere, along the way what was begun in the Spirit was being carried out in their own strength.

Let me ask you a question —if you were in a horse race and you were out in front of the pack —would you be tempted to hop off the horse and finish the race by yourself? That's what the people in the Ephesian church had done. They'd started off with God. But then somewhere, along the way, they got their eyes off God and started depending on themselves. Can you relate? I know I sure can.

Do you remember when you first came to Jesus Christ, how excited you were about the fact that you'd found Him and that He'd found you? Nobody could shut you up!

I've married quite a few couples and there's nothing like it. I've watched people as I've known them before they even met each other. And I've seen them begin to date.

And then I've seen their love grow. And then I've seen them get engaged. And then I've done their pre-marriage counseling. And then the day of the wedding arrives. And the groom is standing up in front and he sees the bride walking down the aisle ... and he can hardly contain himself. He's usually freaking' out ... on the inside.

And then the vows, and the rings are exchanged ... then the song by the sister-in-law, or the cousin, who really can't sing, but who they didn't have the heart to say "no" to when she said, "Oh, I can sing *Feelings*". It's all happening ... and then finally the big moment comes, and I pronounce them "husband and wife" ... and they kiss. They really go for it. They don't care whose watching! They're in another world!

And gang, marriage is kind of like when we first come into a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ. When we give our hearts to Jesus and come into a relationship with Him, it's like we get married, in the spiritual realm, to Him. In fact, that's the exact analogy the Apostle Paul uses for it in the first half of **ROMANS 7**.

And just like we can see a marriage develop in the **NATURAL REALM**, so too, we can see our relationship with Jesus Christ develop in the **SPIRITUAL REALM**. First there's the honeymoon ... no fights ... everything's great. And then you begin to notice some defects in the marriage. Maybe things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, or a little bit of the excitement is gone. That's what Jesus is talking about here, as He calls us back to the excitement we had when we first encountered Him.

If you want to save the marriage, what do you have to do? You have to re-kindle the fire. Because if you don't re-kindle that fire —sooner or later you're going to end up in a separation or a divorce. And what's true in the **NATURAL** is true in the **SPIRITUAL**. And when the fire we had when we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ begins to wane, and we don't re-kindle it, we'll get discouraged, we'll get separated, or maybe we'll get divorced. But for sure we'll be miserable.

And this is what Jesus is saying to us here. And this is why we to be so careful about how we treat our relationship with Jesus. We need to take care of it. Jesus **COMMENDS** the Ephesian church in **vv. 2-3** —because they're doing all kinds of things for Him. But then the **CRITICISM** comes in **v. 4** ... that they'd left their **first love**.

REVELATION 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

You can go to church all your life, and you can have a big Bible, and you can go to Bible studies and other church functions and you can still be off with Jesus. And that's scary when we think about it, because most of us think we're right on with Jesus. But when we really begin to examine ourselves according the Truth of the WORD of God, we have to take inventory in our lives, and we have to ask ourselves ...

- "Are my **DEEDS** done because I'm in love with Jesus?"
- "Is all my **WORK** counting for the Kingdom of God, or am I just laying up treasures on earth?"
- "Is my **PERSEVERANCE** because I'm depending on God for my strength, or just because I'm stubborn?"

Jesus looks at us and says, “I know **YOUR** deeds. I don’t want to see **YOUR** own deeds, I want to see **MY** deeds, done **THROUGH YOU**.”

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ ‘Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

“remember” ... Jesus is asking us to think back to when He was the most important part of our life. The Bible is full of admonitions for us to look back and ponder, and to examine, and to try and figure out what’s going on. One of these many kinds of passages is in **JEREMIAH 2** where God speaks to the nation of Israel through a 16-year old prophet named Jeremiah ... and his words hit a lot of us right where we’re at.

JEREMIAH 2:1-5 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

¹⁻² The Lord told me to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone that He had said: When you were My young bride, you loved Me and followed Me through the barren desert.

³⁻⁵ You belonged to Me alone, like the first part of the harvest, and I severely punished those who mistreated you. Listen, people of Israel, and I, the Lord, will speak. I was never unfair to your ancestors, but they left Me and became worthless by following worthless idols.

God’s saying in **vv. 1-5** ...

“I remember when you were so in love with Me. You weren’t ashamed of showing true love to Me. You didn’t care who knew about how you felt about Me. There was a desert and it was dry and hot and your circumstances were horrible and yet you were so in love with Me ... and you had nothing.

I was your only sustenance. You just loved Me so much. Everything you gave to Me was the best. Your lives before Me were holy lives. You were so in love with Me that you didn’t let anything separate us. But Israel, what happened? What happened to your love for Me?”

And I hear God asking me, and asking you ... through Jeremiah’s words, and through His letter to His followers in Ephesus ...

“What did I do wrong that you turned against Me? That you no longer have your first love for Me? How did I fail you? When did I let you down? What happened to that love that used to move you and drive you to do anything for Me? Have I done something to you that you’re that upset at Me ... that you’re walking away from Me instead of toward Me? Come back to Me.”

Remember how it was when you first met your **first love** ... and you loved talking with others about the changes He was bringing into your life? And then, slowly, your commitment began to wane, and you were only going to church, you were only praying, you were only reading the WORD, you were only telling others about Jesus **WHEN YOU FELT LIKE IT, WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING MORE EXCITING TO DO.** Jesus had stopped being your **first love**.

Remember when your love for Jesus used to drive you to pray for your spouse, your ex-spouse, your kids, mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your employer, your friends, and your enemies? You wanted them to know the joy you had. And then you got laid back and you said, “**Well, if the LORD leads me to, I'll pray for them, share with them, give myself away to them. Maybe.**”

But the fire to share God with people just wasn't lit any longer. Situations to share still came up, but you shied away from them because you weren't really all that in love with Jesus any more. Can you relate to Jeremiah's words? And do you hear the LORD urging us this morning to “**get back to where we once belonged?**” I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

Jesus wants us to come back to Him as our first love, not because we've been *shamed* into it ... not because we've been *talked* into it ... and but because we've *remembered* how it used to be when He was our first love. And because we're *looking* at how our life is now, and we're *remembering* how our life with Him used to be, and we're *choosing* to get back to where we once belonged.

We've heard Jesus' **COMMENDATION** of the Ephesians, we've heard His **CRITICISM**, and in **v. 5**, is where Jesus offers the Ephesians some words of **CORRECTION**. He tells them that their “**first love**” can be restored if they'll follow His instructions.

REVELATION 2:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place –unless you repent.

If the thrill is gone in your spiritual life, or, if your walk with Jesus is great and you want to make sure it stays that way, what do you do? Just pray? No.

In order to come back to my **first love**, I need to **REMEMBER** where I used to be with Jesus. I need to **REMEMBER** all Jesus has done for me ... even when I wasn't giving Him the time of day. I need to **REMEMBER** that Jesus died on the cross for me to offer me the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf., **JOHN 10:10**). It's amazing how many times God calls us back to a **REMEMBRANCE** of how things used to be. Not just how it used to be when we were in the world and in sin ... but what it was like when we first came to Jesus and we were thrilled to know Him. Gang, we need to **REMEMBER**.

But if I want to come back to Jesus —back to my **first love** ... if I want to make sure my relationship with Jesus stays the central priority in my life ... I also need to **REPENT**. **REPENTANCE** is a decision that results in a change of *mind*, which in turn leads to a change of *purpose* and *action*. I need to **REPENT** of living life on my own and begin living for Jesus. I need to **REPENT** of my selfish pursuit of goals that don't include God —of planning my life out and then inviting God to bless me.

REPENTANCE is the admission that the fault is ours and then feeling sorrow for the sin we've chosen. In *The Old Testament*, King Saul talked about **REPENTANCE** when he said in **FIRST SAMUEL 26:21**, “**I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.**”

A lot of people **REPENT** with words, with tears, and with sorrow —but they **REPENT** just because they got caught. Ever done that? It's something we learn when we're little kids —and a lot of people never out-grow it. That's not **REPENTANCE**. True **REPENTANCE** has to come from the heart. You really have to be sorry for what you've done. Sorry in the way that means that you're never going to do it again. And so how do we really **REPENT** ... and show it? I like how Billy Graham put it many years ago ... “**Our repentance needs to be as well known as our sin.**”

We need to **REMEMBER**. We need to **REPENT**. And if I've walked away from my **first love** and I want to come back, then I need to **RETURN** ... **RETURN**, like Jesus says here, to the deeds I did at first ... when I was first in love with Him. I need to invite Jesus to re-shape my priorities. I need to let Him have full control of my heart, my mind, my actions, and my attitudes. In short ... I need to restore the original fellowship I used to have with God ... the fellowship that was broken by my own sin and neglect.

Get back to prayer, get back to Bible study and meditation, get back to obedient service and worship, get back to sacrifice, get back to getting involved in one of the Community Groups that are happening as part of the life of our flock, or start a new Community Group, get back into relationships of accountability with other people who have the same spiritual goals and commitments that you have.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't have to stay the way we are ... that we can become more than we are ... that we can change ... that we can **REMEMBER**, that we can **REPENT**, that we can **RETURN** again to our **first love** ... no matter how long we've been away ... and no matter why we went away.

This morning, if you want to **TURN** to Jesus as your **first love** —or if you want to **RETURN** to Jesus as your **first love**, you may need to establish some new relationships with people who will help you stay on the path and not get off of it. So many times we set ourselves up. We become like the people we hang out with. And if we're mainly hanging out with people who don't have a **first love** relationship with Jesus Christ, then sooner or later we'll more than likely compromise and give in.

And so, if your girlfriend or your boyfriend is pulling you down and away from Jesus Christ, you need to get the relationship right, or cut it off. That's what it takes to be a child of God. If you're married and your marriage isn't working, you need to come back to your **first love**. And then, in the midst of a fight, instead of screaming, and shoving, and staying in the flesh, you can get down on your knees and humble

yourselves before your **first love** and pray and offer yourselves up to Him. That's what a growing, maturing follower of Jesus Christ does.

v. 5 ... or else ... what's this mean? The warning is that Jesus Christ will take His presence and His leadership and go somewhere else. You don't want to be used? Jesus will use somebody else. You know how many churches have died like this? Hundreds, thousands. And not only churches, but people too.

A church may continue to exist without being light in the darkness. Our land is filled with churches like this! We see it everywhere. Sad and desperate. So many churches deny the vital presence and reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—they're just sort of there ... just kind of going through the motions.

REVELATION 2:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Who in the world were the **Nicolaitans**? Well in spite of the speculation by Irenaeus and other *Early Church Fathers*, we have no solid knowledge as to who this early heretical Christian sect was. They're only spoken of here and in **REVELATION 2:15**. But we can make some logical deductions by looking at their name. We know from **v. 15** that they were connected by their teachings to *The Old Testament* pagan religions of Baal and Balak worship.

nico means "**to conquer**" and **laos** means "**laity**". So from the name **Nicolaitans**, it appears that this group's doctrine and practice had something to do with "**conquering the laity**". And so Jesus is probably referring here to the sin of a select group of leaders in a church who were lording spiritual power over other members of the flock—in other words, an *Early Church* form of spiritual abuse.

FIRST TIMOTHY 2:5 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁵ There is one God and one mediator so that human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus.

God gives us earthly leaders for one reason: To point us to Jesus, so we'll let Him be our advocate before God the Father. God doesn't want earthly leaders to stand in the way of Jesus. Jesus and the Ephesian church hated this, and we should too.

REVELATION 2:7

⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ "He who is able to hear, let him listen to and give heed to what the Spirit says ..." (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

Jesus writes this phrase at the end of each of His seven letters. The verb “**hear**” is in the **IMPERATIVE MOOD** and the **ACTIVE VOICE**, and therefore, it commands us to do something at the very moment the message is heard ... it’s a commitment to a decisive and effective choice. It’s like Jesus is saying, “**Don’t just try to return to Me as your first love ... come back to Me right now!**” Gang, the Holy Spirit is wooing us through this letter to the church at Ephesus, to **get back to where we once belonged**. Do you hear Him?

So this morning, **Who** or **what** is your **first love**? Are you letting a **first love** relationship with Jesus drive your priorities, your compassion, the use of your spiritual gifts, your dreams about what career you’re pursuing, and your relationships? Or have you gotten so busy “doing stuff” for God that it’s been a long time since you’ve known Jesus as your **first love**? How can we tell if I’ve moved away from Jesus as my **first love**?

Whoever or whatever I’m spending the most time with is MY FIRST LOVE. Whoever or whatever I’m taking my cues from –about how to live life, about how to make my relationships work, about what my priorities should be –whoever or whatever is in this position of instruction and authority over me, is MY FIRST LOVE.

The word for **overcomes** here in **v. 7** is the Greek word **nikao** (from the same root word in the first part of **Nicolatians**), and it comes from the noun **nike**, meaning **victory**, which literally means, “**to be a victor**”. Jesus is saying that if we follow His instruction here, and return to Him as our **first love**, we’ll be **victorious** in our life with Him.

How awesome, that God promises to bring **victory** to everyone who will stay true to Jesus Christ as their **first love** ... to everyone who will **REMEMBER** and **REPENT** and **RETURN** to Jesus Christ as their **first love** and to the deeds that flowed out of their **first love**. And what does that **victory** look like?

We’ll have **eternal life** in heaven, and **abundant life** right here, right now, on earth. And there will be a **sense of purpose** in all we do. And there will be **a hope and a vision** in our lives —a hope and a vision that is far greater than we could dream or imagine in our own strength. And gang, we all have to make the choice ... to walk in the flesh and be defeated, or to walk in the Spirit as **victorious overcomers**. We all have to make the choice.

Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ... COME WORSHIP YOUR FIRST LOVE AND HEAR
YOUR 2ND STREET MEXICO WORK & WITNESS TEAM MEMBERS SHARE!**

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