

To the Church in Ephesus

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[0:00] So with that, we want to bless James. We're going to pray for him. We're grateful for him. I know he's only had less than 24 hours since his last sermon here. He flew out to the Philippines with a family on Sunday afternoon.

They got back last night. So yeah, God's sustaining him. We're going to pray for him that he can sustain us, speak the word and teach the word in the next 45 minutes.

I want to bless Christina and the kids who are helping Vincent, Danny. Who else is at the back? Alex as well. Okay, we're going to pray and bless. So let's reach out a hand for the kids at the back or for James.

Father God, we thank you. We thank you for our brother. We thank you for this brother. We thank you for the gift of teaching and this heart of obedience for you. We know you love him very much. We know you've called us and every one of us here this morning to hear your word. Lord, I pray that the gospel will be preached in every single room from the back to the front. The gospel that sets us free, the gospel that is truth, the gospel that will stand forever and must above and amidst every storm and every thunderstorm and black rain.

[1:12] And Lord, we pray for James. We pray that the best, best, best sermon he'll ever, ever preach will always be the life that he lives. We thank you, Lord, for his heart. We thank you for the message that he's prepared for us from Revelation 2.

Lord, humble our hearts as we open up our spiritual ears to hear what you are saying to us. So speak to us today, Lord. We welcome you, Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Before that, Aaron, we're going to read the passage today, Revelations 2, 1 to 7. Let's all stand to read the word together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Revelation 2, verses 1 to 7. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

[2:21] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name. And have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen.

Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

This is the word of God. Praise be to God. Thank you, Aaron. Thank you. Please take a seat. Thank you, Kelly and Kuban and the team.

Thank you, Aaron. Thank you, Joe. Joe has a few more years of these hair jokes before he comes to join me. And that's going to be a good day for me.

[3:25] That's going to be a good day. Come. I am your future. Okay, so... It's going to be breezy. It's going to be breezy. We were on a flight yesterday coming back with the Young Life team and one of my staff, immature staff, was sat behind me and he was like blowing on my head.

Just to be funny. But I mean, I'm used to just having it here. Like, hair always just on my head so I didn't really think Aaron was saying, right? He's like, oh, I didn't think it was the thing. But anyway, he found it very humorous.

So anyway, there we go. Hey, good to see you all. Good to see you all. Week two. We're trying to figure things out. I told you last week, we were like, hey, we don't know what's happening here but we're going to take one step at a time.

The TV wasn't tall enough so praise God we managed to get a TV that's a little bit taller. I don't know how that was for visual at the back. Sadly, I am still the same height. And as I said last week, they've told me standing and sitting, it doesn't matter.

It's the same. So I'm just going to sit here and hopefully you'll be able to hear what I have to say. We went through the book of Revelation where we started the book of Revelation and there's only one revelation.

[4:33] It's not revelations. There's only one. And what was that? That was the revelation of Jesus Christ. John was praying. This is old man John. This is the John whom was leaning on Jesus' shoulder at the Last Supper, the one who was dearly loved.

And he's praying many years later. He's on the island of Patmos because he's been sent there because he refused to worship Caesar. And he's praying.

And persecution is happening. That's what I was talking about last week, right? The church is experiencing all the persecution. And he's just praying to God. He's in the spirit. He's going, God, can you help my brothers and sisters?

Can you look after the churches? And Jesus' response isn't, hey, I'm going to come and help you. I'm going to overthrow the Roman Empire. Don't worry. The enemy is gone. He doesn't do that. Jesus says, you know what? You know what's going to help you? I'm going to peel back the curtain. I want to show you who I am. Because when I show you who I am, when I show you the end, you're going to feel better about the now. And so I talked about Jesus being the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.

[5:36] And he says, hey, I was dead, but now I'm alive forevermore. I hold the keys. And this is what I look like. And he had the white hair. He had the fire in his eyes. He had the sword out of his mouth.

When he spoke, it was like, what was the word? When he spoke, it was like the roar of many waters. And then a few days later, we got to experience the roar of many waters.

We got to see on Instagram or maybe just near our own homes the sheer force of water. When you're surrounded by water. And Jesus is almost saying here, when I speak, it drowns out all the empty rhetoric, all the lies, all the distractions.

When I speak, no one else can stand. And you saw the force of that this week. And so then he carries on. And then he actually then starts to talk to the church.

This is why we're doing this. Because as we start this, the title of our series is, we start with the end in mind. Because I'm that kind of person. If it's not worth going, if it's not worth continuing and sustaining, let's not start it.

[6:40] But if we're going to start it, let's see what Jesus says about it at the end. Because these are some of the few words that Jesus actually directly addresses the church and say, hey, I want you to know about this.

I don't know about you, but I want to know. As we do church, I want to know whether this is a kind of church that Jesus is actually pleased with. Because if it's not, then it doesn't matter. Before we even came here, the prayer for me was, God, what do we do?

What should we talk about? What should we learn? And he just says, bring them to me. Not the space, not the destination. Bring them to me. That's the goal of church. I don't know why you gather here today, whether it's because the parents dragged you here, or whether it's just part of the routine, or because it's rainy, so you can't go and have the fun that you were going to have, whatever it is.

I hope you're here, because for the one reason why we all should be here, for Jesus. Jesus says, bring them to me. Are you here to meet the Lord? And he introduced himself last week.

He peeled back the curtain. This week, he actually speaks to us. He speaks to John and says, I want you to pass a message to my church. And this one sends chills down my spine.

[7:49] It's probably, my guess is probably the second most famous one. The one towards the end is pretty famous too. But this one is interesting, and I wanted to talk to you a little bit about this one. Now, he starts off by saying, actually, so just before chapter two, at the end of chapter one, as for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven

churches.

Now, of course, there weren't just seven churches in Asia. There were more. But maybe this represents seven being the complete number. Maybe it just represents the complete church. And actually, as you see, as we go through these seven weeks and these seven different churches, what you see is the problems that these churches face are exactly the problems that we face now. They're the same. In fact, you can say that we are experiencing them to such a degree now that we need to learn and we need to take heed of these words because if not, the consequences can be dire.

And we can see it here as Jesus is talking to the church in Ephesus. So let's talk a little bit about the church in Ephesus first. He says, so the angel of the church in Ephesus writes. So he's saying, angel of the church, pass this message to my church.

And he's passing it to the church in Ephesus. Now, the reason why Ephesus is first is from the island of Patmos. He writes this letter. John receives his vision and starts writing.

[9:07] And then as he sends the messenger, this is the first island. This is the first place he goes to. It's just on the route. This is the first one. But it's more significant than that because Ephesus was a big deal. Ephesus was a metropolitan.

Actually, I wouldn't go, I wouldn't even hesitate to say it's maybe the equivalent of something like Hong Kong. The fourth city in the whole of the Roman Empire, you had, of course, you had Rome, you had Alexandria, you had Antioch where the disciples first were dispersed and then you have Ephesus.

It was the financial capital because everyone would come in from all the different places to deal, to trade. So all different kinds of people were there. It was also a political capital.

Now, the official one was Pergamum, but actually the Roman governor himself lived in Ephesus. And so you see all these people are centering onto this city. First of all, this gives me encouragement because actually, discipling, doing church, doing missions work in a city is not easy.

It's not easy because the city is just filled with distractions, filled with all these things that make it hard to make disciples. But yet you see here, the book of Revelation is almost just a down-to-earth manual on how to disciple, how to be an urban disciple.

[10:19] It was also a religious capital because the goddess that was maybe the most prominent there was the goddess of Artemis, the fertility goddess. The Greeks would call her Diana.

Diana. So you know the sexuality, the fertility, the lust that was all going on there. And actually, that ties into a little bit of why this church in Ephesus was really struggling because it was actually calling people away from all those things.

So this is a capital, and actually, this was a church that was very dear to Paul's heart. He'd visited it once and then he went back and he stayed two and a half years there. And what happened after that, he passed it to a couple called Priscilla and Aquila and they looked after it for a while and then his mentee, Timothy, looked after the church there.

And then, of course, towards the end of the first century, Timothy was murdered. After that, John, young, beloved John, goes back and actually pastors the church there in his final years.

So this is a very important church. What's even more important is Mary herself, Jesus' mother, actually went to this church. So can you imagine being the preacher at this church and you're staring and Mary is there.

[11:30] And she's like, you know Jesus? And she's like, oh, I know Jesus. I know Jesus. Do you know Jesus? So, the church of Ephesus had some pretty crazy senior pastors.

And yet, Jesus has some pretty damning words for them. And these words actually terrify me because as you look at this, now put your Chinese hat on and look and just rank how this church is doing.

What you think is a good church and you see it and you see every single part here. And yet, Jesus is still threatening to close it down. That should scare you.

That definitely scares me. So let's just quickly go through it. I know your works. Toil. I know your toil and I know your patient endurance. He says, I know your works. I know that you guys run so many programs.

You guys do such a good job with church. You have your kids programs. You have your youth programs. You have your social service programs. You have all the programs. I know your works.

You are doing good stuff. James says, faith without works is dead but you've got the works.
[12:31] And he says, I know. It's interesting here. At the beginning, the words of him, chapter 2, verse 1, you can follow me or if you're taking notes, write these down. Who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Jesus is saying, I know because I'm walking right amongst you. I am in your church. I am sat right there. I am right there. It ties back to what I was thinking.

Actually, when Jesus says, bring them to me, when we, well, sorry, when I felt the Lord tell me that this is what we should be doing. We should be going to him together. I reckon many of us and sometimes myself, I don't turn up to church for Jesus.

I'm not really acutely aware that he's actually there. Sometimes I feel as though when I'm sat in a church service, maybe it feels more like a memorial service than an actual service where Jesus is alive and actually there.

Do you know what I mean? Has anyone been to a memorial service or a funeral? The way we talk about that person, we speak fondly of them, whether it's true or not doesn't matter because he's gone now. So we say, oh, that was such a nice person.

[13:35] And we talk about him, we sing songs, encourage each other. Aren't you scared that that's how we treat these services? Jesus says, I'm alive and I walk among the church.

I am here. It's not a memorial service. If that doesn't kind of straighten your back, I don't know what will. But the Lord is here right now. And he says, I am here and I know your works.

I'm sitting through your announcements about the prison ministry and I know that you have a good heart, that you are doing good things here. I know that. I know your toil. I know it's hard work. I know discipling in an urban city is hard.

I know trying to earn money and still run a business but still be upright and still be righteous is not easy. I know it's hard. I know that you are causing such a stir that people are starting to persecute you, that you're starting to be afraid of your life.

I know. I know your patient endurance. I know your resilience in all of this. Can you imagine this group of people as he starts to draw this picture of what this group were like?

[14:38] These people were just committed committed to works, committed to running things, doing things. These are good Christians. So we say, I know your toil.

I know that you are pushing through. It's much easier to do other stuff but you are here and you are patiently enduring. I know all that. Even more so, I know how you can't bear with those who are evil but test those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

Not only are you good at your works, not only are you hardworking and you're resilient, you also know the truth. You are committed to the truth. That means not only do you have great outreach programs, you have great discipleship going on as well.

You have a good BSF group where you know scripture, where you know doctrine to the point where you are so weary of the people outside teaching false doctrine, you have the systems in place where you test and that's incredible and that's good.

You are so committed to the truth and then he says, I know that you are enduring patiently, how you are bearing up for my namesake and you have not grown weary.

[15:48] Man, I would love to hear Jesus say that to me. James, I know everything that you're doing and I know how you have not grown tired. You've just kept going. Isn't that a great compliment that you would receive from your Lord?

You've just been, you're such a hard worker. I mean, that definitely appeals to the Chinese culture. You have not grown weary. You're so good at doing what you're doing.

And so this church, in my eyes, is really doing everything. It's doing it, it's an A-star church. It's doing everything it should. It's loving, it's reaching, it's defending, it's serving, it's doing everything that the church really should be doing.

It's what we should be doing. But, and this is a huge but, but I have this against you. You have abandoned your first love.

Abandoned. So you may be an A-star pupil, but you've forgotten what course you were studying. You may be getting the best grades and doing everything that you need to do, but actually you've missed the point completely.

[16:55] You've abandoned your first love. And this word is strong. I mean, the one that Aaron read I think was forsaken. Not only have you just forgotten it, you've deliberately left it behind.

You've been so caught up in doctrine that you've left the main point of all of it.

You've been so caught up in looking out and serving, you've lost sight of me. You've abandoned your first love. We know that's possible because we know churches, we know we are susceptible to abandoning our first love.

Why do we know that? We know that we can abandon first love in our marriages. If you're a married couple, look over at each other right now and go, do you remember when you first fell in love with your spouse?

Those of you who are dating, wearing matching T-shirts. Cute. We used to wear matching T-shirts too. Then I got big.

I couldn't fit them anymore. Okay, are my children here? My children are not here. So Christina and I, I was 12 and she was 13.

[18:09] Yeah, it was bad. It was bad. It's not good. I could see the judging eyes from the parents already. More emphatically, I was in Sunday school and she was in youth group.

And I remember I was out in my Sunday school class and I was just leaning back because I'm cool and I know all the Bible study and then the youth group kids walk past and I'm just like, what's up?

What's up? And this tiny little girl, Christina, was like, I'll see you.

I need to finish my coloring here and then I'll come over. Oh dear. Do you remember the butterflies? Come on, who's been married here for more than 10 years?

Come on, put your hand up. More than 10 years, more than 20. We are getting exposed to more than 30, 40. Wow. Do you remember like, Agnes, do you remember butterflies for Vincent?

Was that a thing? Agnes is like, no, I do not remember that at all. Do you remember the butterflies?

We were, we started dating when it was like you had to drag the dial-up cable to connect to the internet and then you dial up and then you send an email or you write texts but the texts were only 160 characters, kind of like Twitter.

[19:26] but then because they cost money each text so Christina wouldn't use spaces. She would just like, she would differentiate each word with a capital letter so it was so hard to read and of course every word is shortened as well so as I'm reading I'm like, oh, but I've got butterflies.

Oh, you write so well, baby. TTYL, BRB. Oh dear, the butterflies and then she'd call and I was like, oh, that's so cute and then of course we did have a few years in the middle where we were not dating and then we started dating and back again in university and even then it was kind of like, where are you going?

Oh, let me walk you. Oh, but you're really far away. That's like an hour bus ride to come hang out with me just to walk me to. I'm like, it's okay, I'll do it for you. Like that Adele song, make you feel my love.

I'm going to do anything I need to do to be for you and now she's like, hey, can you go and get me some milk? I'm like, Rebecca's like, oh, Aaron, we need to talk.

The things you do, like, you hang up. No, you hang up. Good night. I love you. I love you more. I love you more. I love you infinity. All those things.

[20:47] What was I talking about? I would say, side note, as I was preparing this and praying over this, I was like, man, maybe there should be just a word for married couples here. Just for a second.

It's not exactly what Jesus was talking about, but it really does remind me. It's talking about that.

Hey, if you've been married for a long time, you've been dating for a long time, look at your spouse in like, a loving, mildly sexy kind of way.

Like, take them out for a date. Like, don't, don't take it for granted because I know that the church can do this because I know that marriages do this. And before you know it, you're like, you're just co-partners in life.

You've forgotten why you loved that person in the first place. You're like, oh man, now you're just annoying. Like, my kids were saying, oh, what were you like when we started dating you?

This was 18, of course. We did not tell them about the prequel. Well, I was still playing a lot of sports in the university's team, so I was going to the gym all the time with my friends. I looked a little bit like Uday.

[21:53] Had just about as much hair as Uday did. And then she started dating me and then we got married and then it was a bait and switch. Now, no working out and no hair. So Christina was like, yeah, that's the person that I fell in love with.

But somewhere along the line as married couples, you kind of just drift off. You just kind of just take each other for granted. You don't date. We were just with a couple who had been married for 40 years and they were like, no, that's the one thing we kept on to, just dating.

Every week, just spending time together. Just whether, through whatever season it was, we spent that day together, we go out and we just spend that time. Talk to each other. Talk to each other like we talk to other people.

That's how bad it gets. Sometimes, right? Because with the people that we are so comfortable with, we don't bother talking to them anymore. We know. We've been around for so long. We've been together for so long. But to other people, we're asking questions.

We're intrigued in their lives and making sure that we do that. So those images, those memories of first love is what Jesus is talking about here. He's saying, you have abandoned your first love.

[22 : 59] You have left it behind. You've forgotten why this gathering is happening in the first place. You've abandoned your first love. You see, he's writing to the church in Ephesus.

So if we actually go to the book of Ephesians, Paul actually talks about this. If you go to Ephesians chapter 1, so now it's not John or Jesus talking to the church in Ephesus, it's Paul.

Okay? So this is a few years before. And Paul's saying, chapter 1, verse 15, for this reason, because I've heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. This was a church of love at the beginning.

The founding fathers of the church of Ephesus had love and so much that Paul had heard about the love that they had for each other. Isn't that incredible?

That this church was known, was heard, had a reputation of love, but many years later now, Jesus says, but you have abandoned that first love. So maybe the first generation, the founding fathers, loved the people that were in their church.

[23 : 59] But as the second generation came, as the third generation came, it completely dwindles. And what started off with love now ends up being just a program. What started off with compassion and faith in the Lord is now just routine.

And Jesus comes and says, hey, you have abandoned your first love. I have this against you. You see, we all forget. We all forget. We all lose our way.

And I think Jesus writes this as the first letter to all the churches because I think this is the biggest thing. This is the most important thing. And then he gives us some solutions as to what he needs to do about it. Now, each time he writes a letter to a church, he comes out with what he knows.

I'm walking among you. I know this is what you are. I know, I know, I'm not a distant God just dropping down bombs. I know because I'm walking amongst you. I know you've got good stuff. But then it's got, you've got some bad stuff.

And now I want to tell you how to overcome it. So here he says, hey, you've abandoned your love at first. And then verse 5, chapter 2, verse 5, revelation. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.

[25 : 10] First of all, remember. So whether this is your marriage or not, but for church, we definitely need to do this is we need to remember every week why we gather here. We need to remember what it is for.

And the reason what it is for is for love. It says, remember from where you have fallen. So it's saying, hey, remember what you were like at the beginning. Those of us who have been Christians for a long time, I think Albert won the prize last week.

Do you remember that first moment you fell in love of Jesus? Do you remember that first moment where he peeled back the curtains to you? Do you?

It seems to me that we need to actively make sure we remember. Remember from where you have fallen. Remember where you came from.

The love that you had. Because just like marriages, just like friendships, it's so easy to forget. And before you know it, you forgot why you're here. You're just doing life, following the routine, and there's no love.

[26 : 20] Remember from where you have fallen. Actually, in the book of Ephesians, Paul talks about this too. So he says, hey, I've heard about your love to all the saints. Chapter 2, and then he says, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, estranged to the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

Hey, church in Ephesus, remember that you were once like this too, that you were once lost. And you have to keep that front and center because somewhere along the line, you get married to the church, you start doing Jesus stuff, you start doing Bible studies, you start doing BSF, you start doing all these things, and you forget that actually the original reason why you came in the first place.

so he says, remember. Whatever you need to do to remember, you need to remember from where you have fallen. Because the more you do church, the more you forget what it was like to have no hope.

The more you forget what it's like, actually, to not have a God that you trust despite anything and everything. do you know what happens then? When you forget what it's like to have no God, you then start becoming judgmental to people.

When you forget that you were once drowning, then you start looking at people who are drowning and go, I'm way better than them. They're so stupid.

[27 : 50] Why would you do that? That's such a stupid life decision until we remember that, oh, I was there. I literally did just that. Remember from where you have fallen.

And then he says repent. Repent. Literally do a 180 and turn. Do a 180 right now before it's too late. Repent and start doing the things that you did at first.

So for relationships as couples, start calling each other again, saying goodnight to each other just before you sleep. You don't do that anymore, do that again. Start praying with each other like you did at the beginning.

Go out and buy those matching t-shirts again. Do whatever you need to do. Do those works that you did at first, not the works that you're doing right now that you've been caught up in.

Do the ones that you did at the very beginning. If not, if not, I will come and I will remove your lampstand from its place.

[28 : 57] Can you believe that? This church that is an A-star church, it has the works, it has the resilience, it has the toil, it has the patient endurance, it has the commitment to the truth. Jesus says, if you don't rediscover your first love, I will shut you down.

Completely. Surely you're like, wait, well it's a good church, it's doing good stuff. Maybe the heart isn't right, maybe the intentions were forgotten, but it's doing good stuff. We're teaching people good, healthy, sound doctrine.

We are serving the poor. Surely you still want to keep us around. No, he says, if you don't have love, I will remove you from your lampstand. This tells me a couple of things.

This tells me God doesn't really need us to do anything. It's about our heart. And our work for God needs to be driven by our love for God. End of story. Our work for God has to be driven by our love for God, otherwise he does not need us.

What's the most famous chapter in the Bible about love? 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 13. Read our weddings, right?

[30 : 04] Love is patient, love is kind, all these things. Of course, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 13, he's saying, hey, if you don't have love, you can be amazing. You can be the most incredible musician.

You can be, you can know all of your scripture. You can be the best teacher, but if you don't have love, you are 80% of your functioning capacity.

No. You are 40%. No. You are nothing. Nothing? Like, all the good stuff that I'm doing wiped out, nothing? That's pretty harsh.

Until we realize why we do all that we do. When we forget love, none of it matters. It's a loud gong. And if we don't have it, he'd rather shut us down. That's the thing that scares me the most because that means on the outside, we can be doing everything right. Jesus talks about that, right?

[31 : 04] You worship me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me. Our outside may be complete. You may tick every box as a good Christian, but if you don't have love, you better remember from where you've fallen, and you better turn around 180 and go back to doing one of the things that you did at first.

It's that important. If not, I will remove you. But then he does say something. He says, yeah, this you have. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans. Nicolaitans were a group of people who had basically made arrangements and compromised with pagan society to saying, hey, we're the Jesus people.

We're still into all of that, but our spiritual liberty gives us a liberty to do everything else as well, so we can still do all the things for pleasure. That's that group of people.

They're saying, hey, yeah, I believe in God, but I'm still going to enjoy everything about life here on earth as well. I believe in heaven, but I actually really just want all the pleasures here. That's that group.

And Jesus says, no. You know what that group did? That group started flirting with other things. They had a first love. When you first meet your girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse, you can see nothing else.

[32 : 15] You are just looking at them. There is no other person in the room. Even if it's a room full of people in the side of your mind, you can still see that person because everything is about that person.

But what God's saying here is what Jesus is saying here. But you've taken your eyes off me. Some people have taken their eyes off me and they've started flirting with other things. other people. But again, you, you've stuck to it but not out of love anymore. I need you to have that love for me. I mean, the Nicolaitans, I think we need to heed that warning too. Jesus hates the Nicolaitans. Jesus hates, doesn't hate the people but hates those who have made arrangements, made compromises to still enjoy all the things of life that don't last.

They started flirting. Actually, one of the biggest things about modern Christianity is modernity itself. All the traps of, all the traps of Babylon, all the pleasures, all the riches, all the luxuries, all the comforts.

[33 : 22] We must not compromise with those and we must still maintain to have that first love. Do we have that first love? And then he says, and he finishes, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

He's saying, the Spirit's constantly going to be talking, guiding us. Let us hear, let us take heed of what is happening here. And to the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

In the Garden of Eden, right at the very beginning, there were two trees, right? There's the tree of life and there's the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve make the wrong choice. They say, God, we don't trust you completely.

We don't think you have what's best in mind for us, so we're going to choose this tree. But he says, to the one who conquers here, to the one who keeps his mind focused on the first love, I will grant you to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

To the one who conquers. The question is, how do you conquer in this day and age? Again, it's the same answer. It's the only answer. Love.

[34 : 31] But love is a hard thing to kind of grasp, right? We know we should love. Actually, there might be some of you thinking, you know what, I don't think I've ever had that first experience of love with Jesus.

What do I do? I don't know if I've ever loved Jesus. Maybe not even the way that the church in Ephesus did. Or the way that you, some people that I see do.

How do I love? It's really hard to love. I'll tell you, you're not alone. I have that too. Actually, my prayer isn't, God, I love you so much.

God is, God, I want to love you. And I want to love you and only you. Help me love you. Show me what that means. Yesterday, I was in 1 John and I was reminded, actually, this is love.

If you go to 1 John chapter 3, if you're asking yourself, I want to know this love. I don't know if I've abandoned it but I don't think I ever even had it. By this, 1 John chapter 3, verse 16, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[35 : 41] When we're talking about love itself, when we want to love others, we must first understand that it is because God loved us. That's how it happens. It's not the other way around. You don't try and conjure up love.

But the moment you realize how much you are loved, then it's automatic. Then it's the only natural response. Chapter 4, verse 8, says this, anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

In this love, in this love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

He paid for the cost of our sins. Verse 10 again, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son. Do you understand that? If you are struggling with love, that's the point that you just cling on to.

Lord, I want to know your love. At the beginning of chapter 3, it says, how deep the Father's love. That's the song that we sing. Until we really understand how much we are loved, it is going to be very hard to love. Does that make sense?

[36 : 51] So if you're with me going, oh, I don't know. I don't know how, I don't know whether I'm loving God. I don't know whether I've abandoned. Just go back to him. Go back to what he did for you. How great his love is for you.

That's it. I think if you were to sum up this whole book, if you say, God, I have a short attention span. Can you sum up what this whole book is about, open up the skies right now and tell me, just sum this up for me.

He'll say, you are loved. You are loved. And that's the secret to remembering that first love is that when you recognize, when you remember that you are loved, I don't know, there might be some people here we actually need to repeat that to ourselves constantly because we've never truly understood what love is.

Forget the love of the Heavenly Father. I've not experienced the love from an earthly father. Forget loving the saints and other people in my church. I've never experienced any love myself or my friends.

The only way you know how to love is if you experience love first. And that's my prayer. That's why we gather. It's because we hope to have a space, a platform where we can practice that love, where we can remind each other of the love that God has for us.

[38 : 19] That's why we gather. That's why we're here because ultimately Jesus is the tree of life. So the one who conquers, how can you conquer? Through love. And who did it?

The one who laid his life down. First. I prayed that, I mean, I'm not saying anything new. Most of you have heard this time and time again. But for most of us, it often just sticks in our brain and never drops into our hearts.

But there's a moment in the Christian faith, in the walk with God, where that knowledge drops in and you suddenly feel the love. And that's what drives you to love.

Because one thing is for sure, you can run all the programs you like and it won't have any purpose in the kingdom of God unless you have love. Some people say, oh, I do all these things because I love people and I'll say, that's not enough.

Don't just do stuff because you love people. Because why? At some point, they're going to annoy you. At some point, they're going to let you down. And once they let you down, you stop loving them. You only do it because of your love for God.

[39 : 25] I'm here doing this. Joe's here doing this. Christina's here doing this. Not necessarily because we love you guys, which we do, but it's because we love him first.

My eyes are on him. And why is my eye on him? Because he gave his son to die for me. When you do stuff out of your love for God, then you can never be disappointed.

Because it's not... It's not mine anyway. The question then becomes, how much do we love God? Because when we do love God, then we do love other people.

1 John keeps talking about this. If you love God, you love other people. That's the summary of the whole book, right? Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. The moment you start struggling to love your neighbors, which is what the church in Ephesus is guilty of, it means you've stopped loving God.

And it's a very easy way to measure this. How quickly do you get annoyed at people? When someone does something that you don't like, when someone acts in a way that you don't approve of, very quickly, your heart will show you whether you love that person or not, which then very quickly will indicate to you how your love for God is.

[40 : 43] And we should be wise to heed the words that Jesus says to the church in Ephesus. You have abandoned your first love. But when you love God, even when people are still figuring themselves out, even when people are still making all the dumbest mistakes, you still have love for them.

Because you remember what God did for them, because you remember how much God loves them, because you remember that you were once in that place too, but you were saved by God.

And it allows you to love that person.

So maybe just a final challenge to us. Your love for God. How would you describe it right now? Is it as bad as what the church in Ephesus have done? They've abandoned it? They've so caught up in doing all the stuff? By the way, as a church, we should still keep doing everything that we, doing the best that we can out of love.

But how would you describe your love for God? How do we, as a church, when someone walks in here who is new, if you are new here for the first time, my deepest prayer is not that you come in here and go, oh, this is a really cool community.

[41:59] This is really cool. They've got some good kids programs. They've got some good singers. My prayer is that you would just feel love and that you would meet Jesus. That's the only thing because if not, this is pointless, worthless, a loud gong, nothing, and Jesus would rather remove this whole thing from his lampstand.

I hope last week what you experienced was just a sense of reverence for who Jesus is, that maybe Jesus isn't quite the bubbling head Jesus that we picture, the one we bring out when we're sick, the one we bring out when we're stressed, that this Jesus is far beyond anything that we can imagine. But today, I hope you understand that all of this, all of this has something to do with love. Final question I wonder whether you may ask.

Well, how do we love? How do we love? I found there's a really practical way for me, maybe as a guy who's less attached to my emotions than the average person.

The way I try and remind myself to love is, when was the last time I went out of my way for someone? That's it. I mean, I know it's a low bar.

[43:20] Those of you who are really good at loving, you're just like, that's lame. But so often, I struggle to go out of my way for someone.

If someone needs something, if my wife needs me to go and get the milk, I'm like, that's out of my way, darling. I love you.

But I love Indeed's as well. Am I willing to go out of my way? If I asked you, hey, can you do this with me? Oh, that takes my Saturday afternoon.

That's going out of my way. Do we have that capacity? Oh, there's prison training this afternoon. Oh, but I was going to go play pool.

Are we willing to go out of our way for each other? Someone is in need financially. Are we willing to go out of our way? I think that's a fairly, again, low bar, but a fairly decent indicator of how well this community loves.

[44:25] Are we a community that are willing to go out of our way, one, for each other, and two, for those outside? I think if we can do that, we might be on the right track. But again, it starts off with the same thing.

It has to be from a group of people who know deeply in their hearts and souls that they are loved. That's the only reason you do it, because there are actually plenty of people that are doing great work outside in society that don't know the love of God.

That's not who Jesus is talking to. Jesus is talking to the church. Jesus is talking to us. Are we a group of people who know that we are loved and are willing to go out of our way?

That's my final question. And I pray that we are. I pray that we are. Why don't we pray now? Why don't we spend some time as I invite the team up?

Let's ask the Lord. Well, first of all, no, no, actually, let's just do what he says here. Remember and repent. If you are that person who actually does remember that moment that you experienced the love of Christ, let's just, why don't you spend that moment reminiscing with him?

[45:39] Jesus, do you remember that time when you just came and touched me so deep in my heart that I couldn't ignore it anymore? Close your eyes and just reimagine yourself being in that place.

Maybe it was at a youth camp. Maybe it was in church. For me, it's the most random place in a pub called Weatherspoons in England on a Tuesday morning that just completely undid me.

I was in tears on this Tuesday morning in this pub because I just realized that the Lord was with me and that he loved me. And I tell you what, that moment keeps me going today.

we spend a few minutes now and we don't need to rush this, can we spend a few minutes now just remembering, reminiscing of that love.

love. Jesus towards the end of his time on earth, he's talking about the signs of the end of the age.

[46:55] He's saying, this world isn't going to be around forever. And he gives some signs as to what will happen at the end. Matthew 24 verse 6 he says, and you'll hear wars and rumors of wars.

See that you're not alarmed, this must take place, but the end is not yet. The nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they'll deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you'll be hated by all nations for my namesake. And many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. But then he finishes with this. That's not a very fun list. But he finishes with the final whammy.

And because of lawlessness will be increasing, the love of many will grow cold. That's the biggest danger. Not floods, not typhoons, not wars.

[48:02] It's that the love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. So now we've remembered.

And for those of us who haven't got that moment to draw back on, that's completely okay. But it's not okay to just be happy with that and go, then it's not me.

Then you ask the Lord. Lord, would you peel back the curtain for me? Would you let me see who you truly are? Would you let me experience the love that this guy is talking about?

And I'll tell you, when you get that moment, when you experience that moment, it won't be any words that I say. If you know, you know. And we join you together.

None of us are perfect. None of us always feel love all the time. It's something that we have to remember. So start that journey today. Ask him to reveal himself.

[49:22] love. You can be a Christian for 50 years and not experience any love, but that's not what we want. But we know that Jesus is willing to pull back that curtain.

And then let's repent. We remember and then we repent. turn back.

commit right now, this moment, to living in a way that is worthy of the love that you received.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. love.

How deep, how great is that love. And I'll finish with this prayer.

It's a prayer that Paul wrote and prayed for the church in Ephesus. He says in chapter 3, for this reason I bow my knees.

[51:15] knees. to the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. That according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts, our hearts through faith.

And here it comes, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That you, that you, English gathering of Kong Fu Church in Admorti in Hong Kong, may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.