

Ephesus: The Church of Heartless Orthodoxy

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[0 : 00] Well, do you remember what it was like when you first developed romantic love for another person? Some of you are still awaiting those moments.

I have those conversations with Ashlyn and Harper routinely as to when they turn 40, they're allowed to actually start to have romantic love for someone else. But it will be that long before they're allowed.

You remember what that was like, right? And Julie and I's friendship started through group meetings of mutual friends. We would go up to the gymnasium of the college that we attended in the evenings, and we would play volleyball together.

And one of my close friends, Phillip, was dating Julie's close friend and roommate, Nicole. And through that relationship, we were introduced and we became friends.

But the romantic stirrings of our relationship really began and were sparked when we went on a group trip with a few friends to the North Carolina State Fair.

[1 : 02] This would have been October of 2006 in Raleigh. And I will have to tell you that I was not the only one who was chasing the sweet, soft-spoken redhead that night.

There were a few others in the group. And she was best available. There's no doubt about that. And there were a number of fellas who had attended. But to make a long story short, I was the one who won the prize for the night.

We left the fairgrounds with her on my arm, not on the other guy's arms. And it wasn't very long before that love really began to develop. We were both in love, and those days were amazing. You remember this in the times that you've experienced it as well, what that's like. We arranged our class schedules so that we could maximize the time that we had together, whether it was actually signing up for the same classes or making sure that the classes that we were taking were happening at the same time, so that our break times were at the same time and we could meet back up in between courses, longing as she did to find me and to be with me again.

And we did really weird things. Like we would spend our evenings now, instead of playing volleyball, we would walk laps around the parking lot of the school campus because we weren't actually allowed to be in certain places on campus together.

[2 : 23] That was against the rules if you were dating somebody. So we had to stay in the parking lot most of the time. We'd just walk around the parking lot and we'd spend time together. We'd do really strange things like we'd get up early in the morning because I knew that Julie at the time would like to drink white mochas from Starbucks and she would like chicken minis from Chick-fil-A.

So I would get up knowing that she wasn't going to get up early enough to have breakfast, and I would get up early enough and I would go and get her a coffee and chicken minis just so I could meet her before she went to our first class in the morning.

Anything that I could do to be with Julie, to find those moments, to display and express our love for one another, nothing brought me more joy in those moments than to be with her.

And I've never stopped loving her. In 14 years, we celebrated 14 years of marriage last month, I guess 16 years or so, or however long that is of being together in a romantic relationship.

I've never stopped loving Julie. But I can't say that I've always loved her in the way that I loved her then. Do you know what I mean? There's not very many days that I get up and go to Chick-fil-A and to Starbucks just because she's not going to get up early enough to do it herself.

[3 : 36] It doesn't happen very often anymore. There's things that come up. We leave off those early days of first love so often. And what Julie and I have learned through the years is that it is entirely possible to have a faithful marriage without necessarily having a healthy one.

Those two things aren't always coexisting together. Healthy marriages are those whose faithfulness is marked by joyful love rather than heartless duty.

And it is so very easy for us in those relationships over time to leave the joy of first love, to leave the feelings and works of first love, and do things really out of just mere faithfulness for faithfulness sake, for duty's sake.

And healthy churches are the same way. Healthy churches, like healthy marriages, are the ones who will continually return to this idea of first love.

First love as it relates to our understanding of the gospel and of our walk with Jesus Christ. You see, it's just like it's possible to be a faithful husband without actually maintaining a joyful love for your wife.

[4 : 58] It's entirely possible for a church to be faithful in doctrine, to be faithful in morality, and yet still fall out of that first love that marks the early moments of knowing Christ and passionately serving Him.

Our faithfulness to Jesus can easily devolve into a lifeless mechanism rather than persevering in a vibrant, wholehearted commitment to God.

And such was the case for this church in Ephesus. They were utterly orthodox in their doctrine.

They were pure in their conduct. But they had a glaring sin that incurred the threat of Christ's judgment, a severe judgment, mind you, as we read it.

This is not merely a slap on the wrist that Jesus is threatening here. He's threatening to actually remove the church from its existence here because of this.

It's severe, significant. Despite everything that they were doing right, their lack of love set them on the path of devastating uselessness.

[6 : 13] So we would say Ephesus is the church of heartless orthodoxy. It's the church of heartless orthodoxy.

And our goal for this morning, and it will be for every morning as we go from church to church, is to hear Jesus' sermon to Ephesus as a sermon to Lakeside, to the church of Lake Norman.

And we want to be asking important questions. Are we a church of heartless orthodoxy? I know we're a church of orthodoxy.

Are we a church of heartless orthodoxy? And if so, what do we do? Has Jesus taken up this same complaint with us?

And if so, are we as a corporate body willing to repent and return to this first love? That's what we want to consider this morning.

[7 : 09] I told you last week that the internal structure of each of these sermons is very similar. There's certain attributes to the messages that Jesus sends. I think that's probably going to be the most helpful way for us to even structure our study together Sunday by Sunday.

So let's look first at the church identity and the Christ title. The church identity and the Christ title. We find that first, the church identity in verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, Jesus says.

Ephesus was situated on the west coast of Asia, this ancient city of Ephesus at least. And it was steeped in cultic worship of Roman Caesars.

In fact, all of the churches that we're going to deal with, except for one, as I can remember, had these temples that were set up in order that the people of those cities in the Roman situation that they were in could worship the Caesars.

They believed their Caesars to be gods. And that was a part of their life and a part of their worship. And Ephesus was no different. But the crowning jewel of the ancient city of Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[8 : 18] It was the temple of Artemis. Artemis was believed by the Greeks to be the goddess of fertility. And what they believed that she offered, in addition to fertility, was the promise of long life, of protection during pregnancies, of sexual pleasure, and so forth.

And Ephesus was the center of world worship when it came to those who worshiped this goddess called Artemis. And if you were to study it, you would find that the rituals of this particular kind of worship was as pagan as you can imagine.

And that was the center of it. The center of it all was right there in this city of Ephesus, where this young church is that Jesus is preaching this message to.

The fight against false religion in this city would have been unbelievably difficult. And it would have been unbelievably dangerous for Christians who were committed to preaching the truth of the gospel.

It would be akin to going to some metropolitan cities around the world that are less friendly to freedom of religion than the United States are, and beginning to preach the gospel and putting yourself in grave danger as a result of doing that.

[9 : 35] There are places in the world today where that is very much the reality for Christians. Ephesus was one of those cities. Well, the church in Ephesus also has a rich history in the biblical New Testament.

They experienced incredible revivals that we read about in the Bible. They are tied to several letters in the New Testament. And they enjoyed a wealth of faithful leadership.

Just think about some of the pastors and elders that we know from the scriptures that this church had at one point or another in its early existence. The apostle Paul is its founder and spent years serving and pastoring this church.

Apollos, who we read about in the book of Acts and in some other places, was a pastor at this church at one point in time. Timothy is in Ephesus when Paul is writing the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and encouraging him as he leads this particular church.

John, who is writing this vision of the revelation, was at that time and towards the end of his life, according to church tradition, the elder of or an elder at the church in Ephesus.

[10 : 41] It had rich, rich spiritual leadership, which is not surprising when we read about the commendations that Jesus gives to it. Ephesus also had a substantial Jewish community.

So that, paired with the fact that the church lived in the shadow of the temple of Artemis, makes it unsurprising, that standing for truth and against false religion is the dominant character trait of the Ephesian church.

Acts 19 records that there was a riot in the Colosseum in Ephesus as it related to those who were preaching the gospel. And in chapter 20, Paul even warned the Ephesian elders that one day there would even come people from within the church, elders in the church themselves, who would attempt to lead people away from the gospel.

And all of this helps us to understand this message that Jesus sends to this very real historical church in the city of Ephesus. Well, let's consider the Christ title for a minute.

That's also in verse 1. Look at it with me. The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. Now, remember the titles of Christ in these seven sermons are given by Jesus himself.

[12 : 05] They are his self-revelation that John copied down for the churches. And they are very much matched by John's vision in Revelation chapter 1.

So we need to understand that when we go back to chapter 1, what John is describing in that vision of Jesus is because he's reflecting on Jesus' own self-revelation.

When he sees this magnificent vision, we don't expect that he actually saw Jesus with a sword coming out of his mouth. But that because John had already heard the messages to the churches where Jesus refers to himself as the one with the sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth, John then goes back in writing this, and he writes his vision of Jesus in the terms that Jesus actually gives.

So when we come to this point, it's not that John is saying, he who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands. No, Jesus is saying that. This is self-revelation.

This is who Jesus is. And each title is significant to the individual message that Jesus sent to the church. And in the sermon of Ephesus, Jesus emphasized his presence and his authority.

[13 : 16] His presence and his authority. Since he walks among the seven golden lampstands, which are the churches, and holds the seven stars in his right hand, which I believe to be the pastors of those churches, the churches were to understand that Jesus knows everything about them and that he has all authority over them, their circumstances, and their future.

And this brings a considerable weight to the potential consequences that Jesus announces in verse five. When Jesus says that if they don't repent, he's going to remove their lampstand.

Well, that carries the weight of the fact that Jesus is the one who has the authority and control and presence in and among the lampstands themselves.

He can and will remove them if they refuse to obey. And we should know before we move on that Jesus still walks among the churches and holds them in his right hand, including Lakeside Bible Church.

He knows everything that there is to know about us. He knows the deepest recesses of our hearts. And he alone has authority over us in our circumstances as a church, in our future as a church.

[14:41] The presence and the power of Jesus then should motivate our obedience to his will and induce our submission to his diagnosis.

That is, as Jesus comes to us and he preaches this sermon to us through the working of his Holy Spirit today, and we hear this complaint about first love, if it's true and yet we reject it, we must recognize Jesus is the one who walks among us.

He knows. He knows. And we must submit to his diagnosis. Well, that's the church identity in the Christ title. Let's move on now to the commendation. We find this in verses 2 and 3 and in verse 6. They're split here. Look at verse 6 now.

So the commendations announced by Jesus here have everything to do with doctrinal and moral fidelity, purity.

[16:03] While many of the other churches that Jesus speaks to in these chapters were guilty of following false doctrines and indulging in sinful practices, the church in Ephesus stood firm on the truth.

They lived faithfully in righteous obedience to God's word. This was a wonderful church in that sense. Works here in verse number 2 is defined by that next phrase, their toil and patient endurance.

In fact, in the language, we could literally render this, I know your works, namely your toil and patient endurance. Toil and patient endurance are then expressed and displayed in these other statements that Jesus makes.

And the terms that Jesus used here to commend the Ephesians, toil, endurance, bearing up, growing weary, they all revealed the severity of their opposition.

Think about this. Here they are. They've got the pagan worshipers of the Roman Caesars. They've got the pagan worshipers of the goddess Artemis. They've got the Jews who are just as hateful to the Christians as the pagans are at this particular point.

[17:16] They're surrounded. They are culturally surrounded by wickedness and false religion. And the severity of that opposition is seen when Jesus describes everything that they're doing as struggle.

It's toil. It's endurance. He's commending them on not growing weary in the midst of it. The church was continually assaulted by false doctrines and behaviors, but they did not grow weary.

They did not tolerate evil. They were determined to test false teachers that tried to creep into the congregation. And though we don't know much about these supposed false apostles or the Nicolaitans, we know that they were preaching a false gospel and they were living in sinfulness. But the Ephesians hated the doctrines and philosophies that were around them. They tested those people just like John had told them to in 1 John, to test the spirits to see whether or not they be of God.

They listened. They listened to what Paul had to say. They were faithful. They were orthodox. They were living right. They were doing right. They were believing right. And on top of all of that, their motivations were pure.

[18:34] Look at what it says in verse 3. They were bearing up for the name of Jesus. So this wasn't orthodoxy for orthodoxy's sake. They loved Jesus.

They wanted to be faithful to him. Their struggle against these false religions had everything to do with the name of Christ. They were being faithful to Christ in these ways.

Jeffrey Weima said this, The final clause, and you have not grown weary, suggests that the problem of false teachers faced by the Ephesian Christians was no temporary crisis, but one that exerted a severe test of their steadfast adherence to the gospel.

And here was a church outstanding for her doctrinal purity. And here's what I want you to notice about all of this, is that this is not a passing superficial commendation.

Jesus isn't, he's not doing the superficial sandwich technique, where when you really have something negative that you want to say to somebody, to try to soften the blow, you start with the bread, which is something nice, and will you look very nice today, or whatever it is.

[19 : 45] And then you finish it off well, and you're doing really good in this other area, but in between is just this complete insult that you want to deliver. And, but you don't want them to be too offended, so you put these superficial commendations on the front and the back.

This is not superficial from Jesus. He speaks truth and only truth. He speaks transparently. And what was true of this church is that it was faithful. The Lord, who knows and sees all, examined the church and determined that it was amazingly faithful.

And regarding the things that were right, this Ephesian church is one that we should really strive to emulate. To be determined to test teachers that come in and out of our church.

To hate the works of evil and of false gospels. That's the commendation. Now let's consider the complaint. The complaint, look at verse four. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

You've abandoned the love you had at first. So despite everything that Jesus commended about their church, the Ephesians were guilty of a deadly sin.

[20 : 53] A deadly sin. It threatened their very existence. They had abandoned first love. Abandoned is a strong word here, isn't it?

Abandonment cannot be understood as simply having lost or forgotten something. As if the church had just kind of gradually and imperceptibly grown cold.

That's not what abandoned means. To abandon something means to knowingly, willfully leave it behind. And what Jesus says of the Ephesians is, here's nine things that you're doing wonderfully. But you willfully and knowingly walked away from first love. Is there really such a thing as, quote, falling into sin or falling out of faithfulness?

That's the language that we tend to use very often, right? And I think we use it because it softens the feeling of guilt that we experience. To fall into something indicates that your current condition is not really your fault.

[22 : 09] That it might just happen to be the circumstance you're in and forces outside of your control had left you in the position that you were in. And we often speak of our sin that way.

But is that even really possible? That's not the language Jesus used here. He didn't just happen to have this happen. Is not all of our sin, even these sins of complacency, always an act of abandonment?

I think they are. We need to remember that. Now the key interpretive issue of this text is what does Jesus actually mean when he says that they've left first love?

What is first love? And how had the church left it? Well, there's several things that people have supposed that this means. It can't possibly mean that they had left love for God.

It's not that. Why would anybody who loves God or doesn't love God persevere in the way that this church persevered? When we point to the other churches who have actually fallen to false gospels and into sinful practices, we would point to them and we say, now those are churches that seem to have left loving God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength.

[23 : 28] But not the Ephesian church. Why would they endure patiently like this if they had no love for God? And if they had no love for God, wouldn't Jesus' correction be different?

Instead of telling them to return to certain works, wouldn't Jesus be saying to return to him? To return to loving him? It can't just be that they no longer love God.

Neither can this be referring solely to the kind of love that we exhibit to others so that they loved God but they were really mean to other people. That might be part of it, but that can't be all of it.

What I picture in this first love scenario here is that the Ephesians might be like that group of embattled and beleaguered soldiers who after years of fighting in the trenches had kind of lost the meaning of the war.

You know what I mean? It's not that they didn't love God. Yeah, they stood boldly on proper theology and holiness. Jesus commended them greatly for that.

[24 : 35] But they had abandoned that sense of joyful, wholehearted devotion that they so embodied at an earlier time in their existence.

They had left the joy of serving the Lord that was motivated purely and solely on the fact of the gospel and the fact that they knew Christ and the love that they had experienced in Christ.

They had become like that dutiful husband who would never dream of cheating on his wife but had stopped being intoxicated by her love and beauty.

That's the dynamic of what's happening here. They would never dare to dream of cheating on Jesus, their Lord and Savior, with Artemis, this fake God.

They would never dream of worshiping a Caesar. They would never do that. But they've stopped being infatuated with the beauty of Christ and with the glory of the gospel. They're proclaiming it. [25 : 37] They're fighting against the false doctrines. But they've left off those works that indicate that they're just so in love with Jesus. They were orthodox in belief, but theirs had become a heartless orthodoxy.

It was cold, tired. Which we have to ask some questions of application with that, don't we? Have you abandoned first love for Jesus?

Have you abandoned that spirit of doing the things that you do simply out of love for him because he loves you? Are you cognizant day by day of the wonderful reality of the gospel and Christ's love has demonstrated on the cross?

Maybe here's a way for us to ask the question. Why are you here today? Why are you here? Now, if you're here because you know it's just the right thing to do and maybe you really didn't want to be here and it was hard to get here, but you know it was right and you're here because it's right.

Well, it's good that you're here. But what's actually in your heart? As you sing those songs, as you sing those songs, on Christ the solid rock I stand, are you cognizantly thinking in that moment, yes, the only solid rock I have is Christ and I'm so grateful that he's my rock.

[27 : 09] I'm so grateful that I have salvation in him and that I found mercy in him. Or are you just kind of going through, to use the word that nobody knew, a perfunctory way of worship?

It's kind of empty and vain. You're just here because you're here. Have you left the first love? What about in the prayers? When we pray together, do you pray or do you just kind of listen?

I hope that at some point you get some credit for listening. Have you left first love? Has our church left first love? Let's look at the correction in verse five.

Remember, therefore, from where you've fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. Jesus is so kind, isn't he? He's so kind that he does not immediately bring the church in Ephesus to judgment, but instead he mercifully shows us a path back to faithfulness.

And here he provides a threefold correction for the Ephesians. He says, here's your problem right now and here's how to make it right. First he says, remember from where you've fallen.

[28 : 24] Remember so that the path back to heartless, back from heartless or orthodoxy begins with remembering what that first love was like.

Do you remember when Jesus saved you? Do you remember the joy that you had? You didn't know everything there was to know about the Bible. You didn't understand everything.

You couldn't quite connect all the dots, but you understood the gospel. And in that moment of conviction of your sin and the Holy Spirit opened your heart to faith, you believed Christ and you were overwhelmed with that sense of joy.

Perhaps you were one of the people that as soon as you became a Christian, you couldn't wait to tell others because you were just so thrilled. You couldn't believe the love that you had just experienced in the person, in the work of Christ.

Church was no longer a drudgery for you. It was exciting because it meant that you were going to go and you're going to be with other people that understood that love in the way that you now understand that love.

[29 : 20] And you're going to be able to learn more about him and you're going to hear more. And you could sing songs in a way that's not weird. You could just sing songs with people that also want to sing songs and talk about how wonderful.

Do you remember? Jesus says the first step back, if that's where you are, if your orthodoxy has grown cold and tired, the first step back is just remember. Remember where you've fallen.

Remember what it was like. Remember the things that you did. Remember the feelings that you had. Cultivate that once again, he says. But remembering how it used to be is worthless without actually turning away from that current sin, which is why the second step that Jesus gives is he says that they must repent.

They must repent. You know what this means to repent is to recognize your sin and then turn away from it. It's not enough simply to see how you've fallen, but to intentionally move back to faithfulness.

And see, here's the problem, I think, with many Christians in church is that get into this dynamic of abandoning first love. They may even recognize that they've done it. They may recognize it.

[30 : 34] I don't have the love for Christ that I had before. It doesn't feel like it felt before. I'm not doing the things. I don't have the joy that I had before. And then they just kind of pass it off as if I guess this is just what it's like.

And they're content to remain in that position and in that condition. No. No. Jesus says, yeah, remember what it was like, but then turn away. Turn away.

This is what James says in James chapter one. He says, do not be hearers only of the word, but be doers of the word. And then he gives that illustration. The men, we studied about it just this past week in our breakfast study.

When we come to the word, it's like a man coming to himself in a mirror. And if a man comes to himself in a mirror and he sees how dreadful he looks in that moment and then just immediately walks away and forgets it all and does nothing about it and lives as if everything is okay.

That's what it's like for somebody to come to the word, to come to the sermon to the church at Ephesus and to say, yeah, that might be me. I'm faithful in all of these ways, but I just don't have the joy that I had at one time.

[31 : 38] I don't have the love that I had at one time. And then you don't do anything. Jesus says, no, turn away from that. And then he gives him the third step. Repentance is made complete when you return.

And what is it that he says to return to? He doesn't say to return to feelings. That's what's significant here. He says, return to the works you did at first.

Return to the works. Now, the link between love and works is important because Jesus isn't interested in heartless religion.

That is doing all the religious things without truly loving him. Neither is he happy with fruitless emotion. That is to develop this kind of spiritualism that never is backed up by behavior that matches or effort that matches.

You know, the people that talk the talk, but they don't walk the walk. Jesus isn't happy about that either. Works without love is just law. And love without works is a lie.

[32 : 53] Jesus is not happy with either one of those scenarios. The two work together. So to return to first love requires that we get back to doing the works that express that love.

And what are the simple things we do? We pray. We truly pray. We talked about it in that Christian disciplines class a couple of weeks ago on prayer.

Like, what really is the purpose of prayer? And we read the one quote. What if God's primary intention is prayer is just for us to remember our deep need for him? That in the act of praying, God does something in his people, something supernatural, that draws them back into this joy.

That draws them back into these not only feelings, but works of first love. Communion with God. Genuine communion with God. Real prayer.

Bible intake. Faithful evangelism. Corporate worship. So on and so forth. We could go down the line. Returning to those works. The things that I had told you that I did for Julie early on.

[34 : 07] I did them because I loved her. And I loved her because she loved me. Because she loved me. I wouldn't have done them if she had just kind of given me the cold shoulder.

Isn't this how the Bible describes Christ's love for us and our love for him? Isn't that what John says in 1 John chapter 4?

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. Just a few verses later, John writes, we love because he first loved us.

You see, returning to first love is just another way of returning to the gospel. When you say, I think that might be me.

I know that I believe what's right. I'm not living in real blatant sin. But there's just something that's just not right. There's something in my heart. It just doesn't feel right.

[35 : 09] And I've kind of lost the joy of it. Just kind of going through the motions. You know what you need to do? You just need to refresh yourself on the gospel. See anew.

The wonderful love that Jesus has for you. And then I think you'll begin to see and reignite this love for him.

Not that you ever stopped loving him. But you return to something that might be missing. That might be lacking. Remember his love. Repent.

And then return to the works that are rooted in that love. Let's quickly look at the consequence. The consequence itself shows us that neither the commendation nor the complaint are to be taken lightly.

Clearly, this is a serious matter to God. And this is what Jesus says in verse 5. If not, if you will not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

[36 : 19] We learned last week in verse 20 of chapter 1 that the lampstands symbolize each church. But it didn't say much about why Jesus uses this image of a lampstand.

So maybe it would help us at this point to understand that a little clearer. The meaning is simple, really. What does a lampstand do? It is not itself the light.

It holds the light. That's its purpose. And like a lampstand, the church's purpose and usefulness is to hold the light of the gospel of Jesus.

It is to display as God's representatives on earth the glory of God and the glory of the gospel. That's what a church is. That's the mission of the church.

That's what we do. That's why we exist. And we do that not only by holding the sound doctrine, but by demonstrating genuine love for Christ and for others because of Christ.

[37 : 21] That's what a church does. That's what the significance of the lampstand is. Now, Jesus said that if the Ephesian church didn't repent of this abandonment of love, he would come and he would remove their lampstand from its place.

And since the lampstand is the church itself, this can only mean one thing. If they continued in heartless orthodoxy, Jesus would remove the church altogether.

He'd remove them. This is not a threat to remove their salvation. It's a threat to remove their usefulness, their privileged position of usefulness in displaying the light of his gospel.

Which reminds us that though this may seem trivial to us, this is not a trivial thing to God. It's not a trivial thing to Christ. Look at how much this matters. To where he says, if you don't return to this first love, I'm just going to remove you altogether.

I'm going to remove you. I'm going to find another church. I'm going to build up someone else to use in your place. I'm not going to use you anymore. I'm going to remove you. And notice also that Jesus' threat is not to snuff out the light.

[38 : 37] It's not to snuff out the light. It's to remove it. Stand. So the gospel will continue to shine until the Lord Jesus comes. And it is the Lord's will who shines it and who holds it out.

But Jesus will not continue to use churches that abandon this first love. And if we become a church of a heartless orthodoxy, we will eventually face this same judgment that Jesus declared against the Ephesians.

And what a dreadful thing it is for a believer or for a group of believers to have lost usefulness in the purpose of its Lord and Savior.

Isn't this what Jesus was getting at when he said that we are the salt of the earth? But if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing then but to be cast and trodden under the feet of men.

Is that not what the threat against Ephesus is? If you don't get this right, you're no good to me. Your orthodoxy, that's fine.

[39 : 41] It's good. But it won't mean anything without genuine love. Without this first love. Well, finally, we see the call and conquer formulas that are present in every one of these sermons.

Verse 7, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And then there's this promise, to the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Now, I wish I had more time. Let me just say it this way. The tree of life in the paradise of God are both allusions back to the Garden of Eden.

And we were talking about this with some of the kids with the scouts group on Thursday night. If you were to step back and look at the big picture of the Bible, the whole story that the Bible is telling, the story of salvation in the Bible is Jesus bringing his people back to the garden.

Back to the garden. Before Adam and Eve sinned, this paradise of God, whatever that was, what Jesus is restoring in the new heavens and the new earth is he is bringing us back to the Garden of Eden.

[40 : 50] And the promise that Jesus says here, because he's the only one that can do that, the promise is that to the one who conquers, they will eat of the tree of life, which was in the garden and

will be in the new garden.

They will eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. A word for heaven, but was also a word used for the Garden of Eden. A paradise of God. Do you see what Jesus is promising here? Jesus is promising that to whoever conquers in faith, he will give them eternal life in heaven with God. And notice the contrast here.

There's a contrast between what is the paradise of God and what is our condition and circumstance now. Now think about how meaningful this must have been for the Ephesians.

Who are faithful, who love the Lord, who want to serve the Lord. They're struggling, but they want to serve the Lord. They're in a very hard place.

[41 : 49] Nothing around them is supportive of them. Their experience in this life was hard and difficult. And there was no sign of that difficulty coming to a conclusion for them.

But what they had promised from their Lord and Savior is that you will come back to the garden.

And the difference in the garden is all the wicked will have been judged and condemned.

You will have eternal life. You will be in the presence of God. And you will have everything that I'm bringing to pass. It will all be yours if you will conquer. This is an amazing promise.

But I want you to notice who the promise is given to. It's not given to the church as a whole. Notice what he says, and he says it in every sermon. To the, what's the next word?

One. To the one who conquers. Salvation comes to the individual. And here's the point of that. You do not receive the gift of eternal life in the paradise of God.

[42 : 55] Simply because you belong to a church that is faithful. At the end of the day, your salvation is a matter of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You cannot simply be in the right place at the right time and it all work out for you. He does not say to the church who conquers. He says to the one who conquers.

An important distinction here. Because the promise only belongs to those individuals who truly will repent of their sin. And trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

And this is where we remind ourselves of this title that Jesus reveals of himself. Jesus knows everything there is to know about you. He knows what's true of your heart.

He knows whether or not you're truly in the faith or if you're playing games. He knows. You cannot slip by simply by linking up with a good church.

[43 : 58] Or being a part of a good family. Or having just the right friends who can kind of bring you along on their coattails. It will not work. Jesus knows. He knows. He knows.

You must personally repent and trust. You see in the significance of that. The wonder of that is that not only he knows. But even the fact that he knows.

He still extends his invitation. He still says in Matthew 11. Come to me. Come to me. He still says in the gospel of John. Whoever does come to me.

I will never cast them out. He knows your true condition. And yet he still invites you into his love and mercy. And when you really begin to comprehend that reality.

That's when you'll understand first love. That he knows everything there is to know about me. And he loves me. And he loves me. And he still wants me.

[45 : 01] And he's still willing to show mercy to me. Then you'll understand what it means to love him. Well let's finish with a quick application.

Do you remember the chiasmic structure that I talked about last week? The chiasm being the overall structure of how these seven sermons are laid out. The mirror.

Oh do we have that as a picture? Did I put that in there? I might not have. It's okay if I didn't. The mirror of the church at Ephesus is the church of Laodicea. Which are similar.

They're linked together. They're similar because the lukewarmness of Laodicea is similar to the abandonment of first love in Ephesus. But the distinction is Laodicea seems to be in a worse condition.

And we might understand it this way. That if Ephesus didn't get this first love thing right. If they didn't return. The next step for them was the next step on that road of abandonment is to become Laodicea.

[46 : 03] Where Jesus is on the outside looking in. Do you see that? Now why in this chiasmic structure. Why would Jesus use these particular churches as the first and the last?

Why not use the two healthy churches as the first and the last? To start on a good note and end on a good note. And I think maybe part of the reason is. Is that the dominant condition among

churches.

Is probably not Pergamum and Sardis the dead church and Thyatira. The dominant condition of churches is not the healthy ones.

The dominant condition I think of probably most evangelical churches. Is Ephesus. And Laodicea. Which means that there's a real good chance.

If we're looking at the odds here. That Lakeside Bible Church could be. An Ephesus kind of church. And this brings us to a crucial moment of application.

[47 : 03] How much like Ephesus are we? In the good and in the bad. We're going to have to continually return to these works of first love. Genuine communion with God.

Sacrificial service to one another. Compassionate evangelism. Authentic corporate worship. All of these things. To maintain the joy. And the way we do that.

Is never leaving the focus of the gospel. That's what we say is the number one value of what we do. We are a gospel focused church. Meaning that everything we do.

Comes through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Which includes a clear view of is a great love. Which motivates our own love. And we can't forget.

That a church is only as healthy. As the individual members. That make it up. We will not be something as a whole.

[48 : 01] That we are not as an individual. I heard someone say when I was growing up. Perhaps you've heard something similar to this. If everybody in my church was just like me.

What kind of church would my church be? That's a bit of a scary question to ask. I don't know that I want to give an answer to that. But it's a good one.

He who has an ear. Let him hear. What the spirit says to the churches. Let him hear. Let him hear.