

The Church at Ephesus

by Denny Kenaston

Denny Kenaston's sermon on the church at Ephesus emphasizes the foundational role of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in establishing a vibrant and influential church community.

Duration: 1:01:55

Scripture: Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Ephesus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by discussing the joy and freedom that comes from singing the song of the soul that has been set free. He then announces that he will be speaking on the topic of the church, specifically focusing on Acts chapter 19. The preacher emphasizes the importance of worshiping the Lord with joy and exaltation, and encourages pastors to shake the 'dead wood' out of their congregations. He concludes by reminding the listeners to remember their initial love and passion for Jesus and to not lose sight of it.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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Praise the Lord. Well, that's the way it ought to be when God's people are together. You know, to worship the Lord from the joy of our souls, to exalt Him, to lift up His name, to extol Him, like Brother Kenny has been admonishing us, that ought to be the free flow of the hearts of the children of God.

Amen? The song of the soul that's been set free is a sweet song and it's easy to sing. That's the way it is with God's people. Well, I greet you in Jesus' name this evening.

We come to the last of these four messages on the church. Just having some thoughts and meditations about the church. I have a few announcements to make, but I think I'm going to hold those until my message is over.

I'm not too good at announcements and messages together, so someone remind me of those if I forget them. Just a couple of announcements to make here at the end. I'd like you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts this evening.

Acts chapter 19. Acts 19. It's a beautiful story there in Acts chapter 19.

You all have it? Let's pray. Shall we do that? Father in heaven, we sing before you. Now, Lord, we quiet our hearts before you.

We know that both of those are fitting. You are the King. You're the Lord.

Father, we come bringing this last meeting to you. We come bringing our hearts to you. Would you write on our hearts this evening, Father, the visions of God? Would you take your finger and write on the fleshly tables of our heart? Your will, your heart, your purposes, your desire, dear Father, for the church in these days that we're living, Father in heaven, we look up to you tonight, God.

We look away from ourselves, all of us, and we look up to you, God. It is by your grace that we will hear what we need to hear tonight, and, Father, it is by your grace that I will say what needs to be said tonight. So, Father, we pray, pour out your Spirit upon us this evening, Lord.

Hide us behind the cross, dear God, every one of us. Let us just sit here, Lord. I know it's this big gymnasium, Father, and the acoustics are kind of loud in this place, but, oh God, would you just hide us in your presence this evening and let us sit as it were in the presence of God and listen to the voice of God speaking to our hearts.

This is our prayer, Lord. God, we commit this message into your care. Have mercy upon us, Lord.

Fill us with the Holy Ghost, all of us, Lord. And if not, then do in our hearts what needs to be done that you can fill us with the Holy Ghost, all of us. In Jesus Christ's name I pray.

Amen. The title of my message this evening, following the theme of the church as we have through these meetings, tonight I'd like to speak on the subject, the church at Ephesus. You know, we've been looking at some pretty high and lofty visions.

We looked this morning as we gazed into John chapter 17 last evening. You know, it's also good while we gaze into the lofty dreams and visions that we find in the New Testament, and like this morning in the book of Ephesus, it's also good for us to come down to earth and see how God in days gone by worked out these lofty visions that we've been looking at all weekend long. Yes, they are lofty visions.

Yes, they are heavenly visions. Yes, they are breathed out by the Spirit of God, and they are the heart of God for the church of God wherever it is in every part of the world. But brothers and sisters, this thing has to come down to earth or it doesn't do us any good at all.

Amen? It must come down to earth, and tonight we want to look at an example where that beautiful vision came down to earth, a very, very earthly place, and God raised up a beautiful church there, and that is the church at Ephesus. Ephesus is one of the most famous churches in Bible history. We looked at Christ's

prophetic words of promise where He said, on this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Well, Ephesus is one of those beautiful examples where we can look at it, where we can point at it. It's in the holy record. It's an example of a group of people who did exactly what Jesus said, and guess what? They got a church just like He said they would.

Hallelujah! Do you think that if they did that back there, don't you think that God would do the same thing for us in this hour and day if we would take His words just as seriously? Remember what He said, You build your lives on Me and I will build a church. I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. That's what Jesus said.

Hallelujah! That promise still stands sure today, brothers and sisters. Do you believe this? On this rock I will build My church. The church at Ephesus was founded upon the rock Christ Jesus.

We'll see as we read a little later. The book of Ephesians is one of the most Christ-centered epistles in the New Testament. Look at that.

And it is the sweetest example of a heavenly church that you can find. But isn't it interesting that those two come together? The beautiful example and the Christ-centered church that it was. You go through there and you will look.

Dozens of times in the book of Ephesians you'll find these words, In Christ, in Him, and in Whom. Brothers and sisters, the church at Ephesus was founded upon the rock Christ Jesus. And it wasn't just the testimony of Jesus.

It wasn't just the doctrine of Jesus. It was Jesus Christ Himself. He was the chief cornerstone of the church at Ephesus.

We're looking at that church this evening, a famous church in Bible history. It was to Ephesus that Paul wrote the clearest revelation of the ekklesia, the called-out assembly. And we looked a little bit at some of those lofty statements that were made this morning, and so we'll just skip those and move right into our meditation here in Acts chapter 19.

Now, I want you to notice as we read down through these verses that the apostle Paul was the church planter who was responsible. He was the human vessel that God used to plant a church at Ephesus. And Paul, he used these terms.

He even called himself a wise master builder. Paul was a church planter. He was an apostle.

He knew how to lay the right kind of foundation stones so that a New Testament church could grow up on top of that foundation. He knew how to do that. He was an apostle, a church planter.

And Ephesians was one of those churches. This church is built on Jesus Christ, and this is an example of a church that Jesus built. Let's look and see, first of all, how Paul laid foundation stones and a mighty church grew up on top of it.

Notice as we read through these scriptures in Acts chapter 19 and verse 1, And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coast, came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples. He found a group of men there who were disciples. They were wanting to go the right

way.

They were open. They were teachable. And as we read a little bit further, we find out they were the disciples of John at this point.

But the attitude in the heart of the disciples of John was the same as the attitude in the heart of the disciples of Jesus. But they were disciples. And he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? What a bold statement to ask right off the front, right at the beginning, right at the very beginning of what he does there.

He starts right out and speaks foundational stones to those men. Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? That's a good question. That's a good question for us to ask you this evening, isn't it? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? You say, oh, come on, Brother Denny.

Don't you know your theology? Of course I received the Holy Ghost since I believed. Everybody receives the Holy Ghost when they believe. Well, my question to you is, is the Holy Ghost a reality in your life? I'm not asking you whether you have your theology about the Holy Ghost right tonight.

I'm asking you whether the experience is there in your life. Have ye received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Paul was bold enough to ask that question. And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

Wow, what a statement. What? Holy Ghost? Who's that? Hmm. Paul knew right away, something isn't right here.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, unto John's baptism. Now, John's baptism, that was a good baptism. We know what John's baptism was.

It was a baptism of repentance. He was the one, he was the forerunner. He's the one who went ahead of the Lord Jesus to prepare the way of the Lord.

He was the one who said, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. He was the one who said, the Messiah is coming. Are you ready? The Messiah is coming.

Bring forth fruits, meat for repentance. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. And praise God for a baptism of repentance.

But a baptism of repentance was not enough. But I do want us to notice that these were there in the beginning of the church at Ephesus. They were disciples of John.

They were baptized with the baptism of John. And they had repented. Good foundation stone.

Good way to start. A good bunch of men to start a church with. Twelve men.

You'll find a little bit later that's how many there were. Twelve men who had been baptized with the baptism of John. Because they had repented.

Because they brought forth fruits, meat for repentance. Because they came forth confessing their sins. And they did that looking for and waiting for and hoping for the Messiah.

Imagine the excitement in those twelve men's hearts when they found out He had come. Hallelujah. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on Him which should come after Him.

And that is on Jesus Christ. Paul preached Christ. Do you see the foundation stones that he's laying from the very beginning? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Oh, you've been baptized with the baptism of repentance? Now I'm here to tell you that Jesus the Messiah has come.

And he preached to them Jesus in that place. These are foundation stones in the beginning of the church at Ephesus. And the Bible says in verse five, When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them. And they spake with tongues and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

What a beautiful way to start a church! Twelve men! I wonder what God could do with twelve men that are full of the Holy Ghost, who've been baptized with the baptism of repentance, who've been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and who have been filled with the Holy Ghost. I wonder what God could do with a dozen men up here in this area who are willing to walk like that. This was the foundation stones which Paul began to lay in the church at Ephesus.

Beautiful ones! They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And he laid hands upon them, which, by the way, was the custom of his day. That's what the apostles did when somebody was baptized.

They laid hands on them and prayed. Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Have you been baptized with the baptism of repentance, my dear brother, my dear sister? Is the reality of Jesus Christ real to you? Is there a vital relationship with Jesus Christ? See, Paul is laying the foundation stones of a famous church. And we can see what those foundation stones are.

Jesus Christ. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. Don't ever forget it.

We need no other methodology than a vital relationship with Jesus Christ if you want to see a New Testament church. And we said some things about that earlier in the weekend. Paul preached Christ crucified and risen from the dead to those men.

He emphasized the Holy Ghost. There was practical, ongoing repentance. Let's read a little bit further and see what happened with these twelve men.

He went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. Paul was a radical. Three months he went to the synagogue and spoke words which caused controversy, which caused disputings to take place, which shook the synagogue.

And finally, after three months, when divers were hardened and believed not but spake evil of that way, which is the only way to come to the Father, before the multitude, he departed from them and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrinius. And this continued by the space of two years, so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of Jesus, the word of the Lord Jesus, both the Jews and the Greeks. Now, just think about that for a minute.

Talk about an influence. All in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. The news went out in every direction.

This is the beginning of a church. It sounds like this church is on fire, doesn't it? It sounds like this church is expanding immediately. It sounds like this church is having an influence right there in its community and even further than its community from the beginning.

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Now that shook the community. And if you could just imagine, that would shake this community also, wouldn't it? If somebody would just come with a little handkerchief in their hand and bring it to somebody just like that, demons run in every direction.

Well, that's what happened here in Ephesus. You believe that? Hmm? You believe the Bible? That's what happened here in Ephesus. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.

You see, they kind of had the same mentality that a lot of people have in America today. There's something magical about this name Jesus. And so they throw it around and try this and try that and they think it's in the name.

And my dear brothers and sisters, it's not just in the name. That name doesn't mean anything if the person is not behind it. And they found out real fast that you don't just throw that name around.

It doesn't work that way. It is the person of Jesus Christ that makes the name of Jesus Christ a name of power and authority. Don't forget that, my friends.

It's the reality of Jesus Christ in your life and my life that makes the name of Jesus Christ that name which is above every name and a powerful name and a name that has influence in the communities where we live. It is because the person of Jesus Christ is a reality in our heart and life that that name has power. Because these guys, hey, look at that.

Paul's using this name. They were listening. They were watching.

Things were happening and they thought, Oh, we're going to do the same thing. Let's try this thing. Let's go use this name.

Well, did they get a shock? And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and the chief of the priests which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Now just imagine this now. Put yourself in their shoes.

Seven men go to deliver one man who has an evil spirit in him. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus, I know. And Paul, I know.

But who are you? I like that. Who are you, fella? But I like that. That evil spirit knew who Jesus was.

And that evil spirit knew who Paul was. I like Leonard Ravenhill's words. You know old Leonard Ravenhill? He said, Are you known in hell? Well, does hell know your name? Have you shook hell's kingdom enough that hell knows your name? Hell knew Paul's name.

And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them and overcame them, seven, and prevailed against them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus. And fear fell on them all.

And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Look at that. So, Jesus' name is becoming famous in this city.

It's becoming famous for the very reasons that we spoke about this morning. Because of the work of God that was going on. Because of the preaching of the word of God.

Because of the lives of these disciples who have been transformed, who have been filled with the Holy Ghost. The name of Jesus is magnified and it goes out in all of the community of Ephesus. And many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds.

That's a good way to start a church, isn't it? Many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds. And many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men. And they counted the price of them and found it 50,000 pieces of silver.

I figured that one out. It's \$360,000 today. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Beautiful. Now, brothers and sisters, what we're doing as we look into this account, we are looking at the church at Ephesus. This is the beginning of the church at Ephesus.

It seems that Paul sensed by the spirits that Ephesus would become an important center for the gospel in all of Asia. You know, you know his pattern. Three months here and then gone.

Two months here and then chased out of town. Two months over here, stoned with stones and then chased out of town. Paul was kind of on the move all the time.

But for some reason, Paul sensed by the spirit the urgency and the importance that he would pour much of his time and his energies and his church planting, giftings and abilities into this one church. And there's a good reason for that. Because all many other churches sprung up out and around the church at Ephesus.

You'll find six of them mentioned in the book of Revelation. Those churches are all churches which were established by that church which was established in Ephesus. A famous church, this church at Ephesus.

In a sense, we could say that this church at Ephesus was Paul's church. He laid the foundation stones there. He stayed there a long time.

He poured his life out to them. In fact, he was there for three years. It says in Acts chapter 20, and he told the elders there.

He reminded them of how he was while he lived there. And for the space of three years, he ceased not to warn them day and night with tears. Paul poured his life out for this church at Ephesus.

And what happened? A mighty church was established there in Asia. And that church became a hub where many other churches were established because of it. And oh, brothers and sisters, that is the will of God.

That's the will of God for every church. That every church become a mighty church that is on fire for God. That every church become an influential church.

That every church plant other churches. That was the church at Ephesus. It's very evident that the people rose up and believed God here as we read this account.

The people loved the Lord Jesus with all of their hearts. The people were disciples of Jesus. They believed the doctrines that Paul gave them.

And Ephesus became a mighty center for revival and gospel preaching. From there, the gospel went out into all of Asia. And if you study the ancient maps, all of Asia in those days was where the country of Turkey is now.

Mighty churches. All the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation there were right around there. I mean, it's just like here's the center and there are little stars out around the church at Ephesus.

And there were other ones also that were started that are not mentioned in the book of Revelation. Many churches came forth out of this one church. That's God's will, brothers and sisters.

I read, oh, it's a few weeks back now. I read a biography of a dear old man. His name was Robert Chapman.

He was a brethren man who started a church in a little city in England called Devon. This is like back in, oh, 1820, 1830. He was a friend of George Mueller and he was a friend of Hudson Taylor.

And, you know, all of those men, they knew each other. And this man was a godly man. And he had an influential church.

And God used that man to raise up a powerful church there in the city of Devon. And God allowed him to live a long time. He died at 99 years old.

And he preached until he was 96. They say he preached hot and vibrant sermons until he was 96 years old. I've got plenty.

Thank you, brother. Imagine that, 96 years old and still full of the fire of God. Well, when that man finally laid his head down on his pillow and went to glory, the record says that he left behind him 80 churches all scattered around Devon where the first church started.

Oh, God, do it again and again and again. Oh, that God would raise up a church that at the end of 40 or 50 years, there's 50 other churches scattered all over the place that have sprung up out of the influence of that one church because it was founded on the rock Christ Jesus and it continued to love Jesus with all of their hearts. That was the church at Ephesus.

Many, many churches sprung up out of it. The example of the Ephesian church is a challenge to every one of us as we are here this evening. Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Ephesus.

Seven years later, he wrote an epistle, most famous epistle in the New Testament. He wrote the book of Ephesians. Seven years.

The church was seven years old when Paul wrote that awesome, lofty book called the epistle to the Ephesians. It is the clearest revelation of the church. There are no corrections in the church in the book of Ephesians.

The words sweep you away from an earthly church and ride into one that is in heaven. And I believe it is because Paul was drawn out by the Holy Ghost to write what they could receive. This was a solid church.

This was an established church. And brothers and sisters, it's an example to every one of us as we're here this evening that if you build your lives on the Lord Jesus Christ and you get together corporately and you have that kind of a desire and a burden to build your lives on Jesus Christ, God will build a church! Do you believe that tonight? That's a promise in the Word of God! Oh, listen, someday when we stand before God, we will stand without excuse for our dead churches. We will stand without excuse for our dead churches, for our formal, ecclesiastical, doctrinal dead churches where the reality of Jesus Christ and the fire of the Holy Ghost has not burned for a long time.

We will stand without excuse in that day because the promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, God has not changed. I tell you, you look down through the annals of church history and you will find wherever there was a people who decided with all of their heart that they're going to build their lives on Jesus Christ and the reality of Christ in every one of their hearts, in every one of their lives, in all of the church.

Boom! A beautiful, influential church grew up. Isn't that right? Many of you read church history. Isn't that right? That's what happens.

Oh my, some of the stories I've read about the early Anabaptists and, you know, they get chased from one place to another and they run to a new valley and 20 years later there were churches all over that valley. Why? Because they were founded on the rock Christ Jesus. That's why.

And wherever you do that, Christ builds a church. That's just how it works. It's good for us to consider the testimony of the church at Ephesus.

Even though we may sit here this evening and say we are a long ways off from that, it's still good for us to consider the testimony of the church at Ephesus because it's an example of what can be anywhere by any people. It is an example to us, brothers and sisters. One year later, after Paul wrote his letter, he sent Timothy to Ephesus to bring more order and that's where the book of 1 Timothy came from.

Timothy was at Ephesus when Paul wrote that book. That's where he was. What's Paul doing? He's still watching over this hub.

He's watching over this church that's starting churches. He's watching over this church that's founded on the rock Christ Jesus and he sends Timothy there and says, Timothy, this is how you ought to behave yourself in the church, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Amen.

That's what Paul gave him. One year later after that, he wrote 2 Timothy. And then shortly after that, he went to heaven.

It's a beautiful history. The fulfillment of Christ's promise. I will build my church.

And later on, even the Apostle John felt at home there at Ephesus. And I understand if you study church history, that he was the bishop there for some time in the church at Ephesus. It's very interesting to me that that's where the beloved Apostle John felt at home in the church at Ephesus.

As we study the historical record, it is very clear that the church at Ephesus became a mature church, a mature body of Christ upon the earth. It was a sending church. It was a church-planting church.

It was an evangelistic church. All Asia heard the gospel. It was an example to other churches.

It was a church full of leaders. Look at Acts chapter 20. It was a church that edified itself in love.

And it was a warring church that did damage to Satan's kingdom. That was the church at Ephesus. Oh, brothers and sisters, that is God's heart for every church.

That is what God wants out of the church. Whatever churches are represented in this place this evening, that is what God wants. The church at Ephesus is an example to us of what God would do if we would keep building on the rock and to have a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

Remember what I said on Friday evening? What it means to build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ? It means to live in vital reality with Jesus every day. And dear brothers and sisters, though we thank God for one here and one here and one there who, yea, does in fact live in vital reality with Jesus Christ every day, the sad commentary is that most of the people in most of the churches do not live that way. And if you're at all honest with yourself and honest with reality, you know that it's that way.

I talk to pastors on the telephone, and they moan and they groan and ask counsel and wonder what they're supposed to do. Here they are. Ten percent of their people have vital reality with Jesus Christ and the other ninety percent don't really care.

And these guys are trying to lead these people. What a burden! Ninety percent of dead wood and ten percent alive. And they're trying to make this thing go.

And they're trying to preach the truth. And they're trying to lead the people. And the people are like a calf looking at a new gate.

No way, no way. And usually they get run out of town if they get real serious in their preaching and in their counseling in the church. And these pastors call me up and say, Brother Denny, what do I do? You know what I tell them? I tell them, look brother, you have two choices.

You either bail out of that thing, or you shake that bush so hard that all the skunks run out and you be grateful for whatever you have when you're left. Do you think it's right to do that? I think it's right to do that. I think it's time we shake the bush until all the skunks run.

Because they're just sitting there like dead wood. Well, I don't think we ought to do that at all. Ministers of doubt.

Every time somebody gets a little bit of fire, a little bit of hope, a little bit of zeal, maybe that God could do something. Well, you know, they're the firemen. You know, they carry the big buckets of water around and wait to see who's going to be on fire next.

Good. Got him quieted down. Now we can relax again and go our merry dead way for another five years.

Oh, brothers and sisters, it's time that God shake the churches in such a way and raise up something that can be a testimony to the glory of Jesus Christ in this area where we are. Dear brothers and sisters, how long will we wait? You know, I thought about it as I was praying and meditating this afternoon. I thought about the church in the book of Acts in Jerusalem.

You know, how that church was started. Hmm? Ten days on their face before God. Then Pentecost.

Right? And before that, trials and tribulations and Jesus being crucified and hiding in the upper room, afraid for their lives and the resurrection. Then there they are. He disappears out of their sight and leaves them the biggest command that would put the biggest burden on any one of us.

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoosh! He's gone. Whoa! What? You're going to give us a job like that? And then you disappear? They went to the upper room and they stayed there for ten days seeking God, examining their heart, dealing with the issues in their life, remembering the failures, I'm sure.

Peter wept over his failure a few times there in the upper room. But hallelujah, after ten days of seeking God, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all in one accord in one place and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. And guess what? Church popped up just like that.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wonder what would happen to all the churches that are represented in this place this evening if instead of you just continued on with all your woes, the whole congregation fell on their face for ten days and sought God. I wonder what would happen. You already know what would happen and so do I. Amen? We know what would happen.

Same thing that always happens when people get serious with God. The church at Ephesus. Ascending Church.

Brethren, this is where God wants us to go. This is the New Testament standard. Amen? You know, some people say, yeah, you got to watch those people at charity.

They don't have any standards. Here's our standard. By the way, we do have standards.

You know? Practical ones. But there's some other standards that are higher than those practical standards and they're the standards of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. That's the standard, my brother, my sister.

Jesus Christ is still the same. His methods have not changed. Let us receive this example and be challenged and inspired by it and go home like George Brunk did and get in our closet and say, I'm not going to come out until God changes me into another man.

Well, I wish we could just stop right here. Makes a nice story, doesn't it? But that's not the end of the record of the church at Ephesus, which becomes a challenge to every one of us. 30 or 40 years later, we find the church at Ephesus recorded again.

Some of the history of the church at Ephesus, 30 to 40 years later. And though this is a beautiful testimony, it's a good story, and we'd like to just stop the whole thing and go home and say, Amen, Lord, let's go for that. Let's face the reality, the reality of what the church at Ephesus faced 30 or 40 years later.

You know, I was thinking about it the other day in my own prayer time. I thought these words. You know, our church back there down in Leola is 22 years old today.

Isn't that right, Brother Moses? Today, 22 years ago. The choices and the decisions that we make in the next 20 years are far more important than the ones we made in the last 22 years. What we do in the next 20 years will determine where we really are going to be.

Hey, it's easy to ride the wave. Oh, lots of things going on and all that. Hey, what about the next generation? We prayed about it just this evening.

Bless God, if the fire of God doesn't get transferred to the next generation, we're done. We're done! It's not time to coast, brothers and sisters. It's time to rise up in the zeal of God one more time and seek God for an outpouring of the Holy Ghost in our midst also.

For the next generation, our children, some of our children, have never seen God move in a mighty way where they could say without a doubt, Oh, God is in this place! We need to seek God for that, brothers and sisters. The church at Ephesus, 30 or 40 years later, all of what we have covered has happened, but everything is not well at the church at Ephesus. Revelation chapter 2, if we could.

And you know, it's kind of sad. It saddens your heart to have looked at all of that and then come and read this. But brothers and sisters, this is reality.

This is reality. That a group of believers can go from that to this in 30 or 40 years. That's reality.

None of us are exempt from it. I mean, if anybody had a good foundation, they did. The Apostle Paul fussed over them way more than all the other churches.

And still, problems. Now, there's two ways that we can look down through these verses. Most of the time when these verses are preached on, they are preached on an individual basis.

We challenge people one-on-one. Have you lost your first love? But I want to just remind you this evening, this isn't written to one person. This is written to a church.

This is written to a church. Praise God for those ones here, here, and there who recognize they've lost their first love and get on their face before God and repent. And maybe you're one of those here this weekend.

Maybe you've been around here all weekend and finally you realize, I have lost my way and I don't have the reality of what I used to have. Then you take these words and take them to your heart personally. But oh, God would have it that the church would grab ahold of these words and in a unified way, they would respond to the challenge of these words in Revelation 2. Under the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, I know thy works.

Those are sobering words when you think about it, brothers and sisters, because it's exactly the same today. Jesus can say the same thing to every one of us. Every church that is represented here, I know thy works.

Oh, if we would just get honest like God is honest right here and allow God to put his finger on our works, because he knows them. He knows where we are. He knows what the church is like.

He knows why the church is that way. He knows whatever the struggles were that the church lost its way. He knows our works, brothers and sisters.

He knows. He's God. His all-seeing eye looks right down into it all and that's the way it was with the church at Ephesus.

I know thy works and I know thy labors and I know thy patience and how thou canst not bear them which are evil and thou hast tried them which say that they are apostles and are not and has found them liars and has borne and has patience and for my name's sake has labored and has not fainted. This is beautiful. It's beautiful.

I mean, this church is still a very powerful church. This church is still a very influential church. That's quite a list of credentials that Jesus gives to them.

He's saying, I've been watching you. I've been watching how you live. I see how you're standing for me.

I see how you're laboring. I see your patience. I see your discernment.

I see how you're trying those that are evil and all of those things. God says, I see all those things. And that's good.

And I'm glad for that. But then he says very sobering words which when we understand what I've been saying all weekend long, these are the most sobering words that the church at Ephesus could hear because they've lost the reality. And if you lose the reality, then Christ is not building the church the same way anymore.

It's time to wake up. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love. And I want you to notice here, brothers and sisters, sometimes preachers say these words and I don't think they realize that it's not according to the record.

They say you have lost your first love. But the scripture doesn't say they lost their first love. The scriptures say they left their first love.

That means they made conscious choices. There were situations that came their way and they allowed their heart to get hardened. Maybe it was a trial in the midst of the church.

Maybe there was some problems with this brother and this brother. And they allowed their heart to get a bit hardened. Then some other troubles came in and they allowed their heart to get a bit colder.

They left their first love. Brothers and sisters, it's that way. Whether it's you personally or whether it's a whole church corporately, we don't lose our first love.

We leave our first love. Often people ask me, they say, Brother Denny, do you believe that we can lose our salvation? You know, the theologians, they'll come and ask me, do you believe that we can lose our salvation? And I look them right in the eye and say, No way! No way! I don't believe we can lose our salvation. Oh, I thought you did.

No, I don't believe that. Then I tell them, I believe you can throw it away. You can't lose it.

It's not just going to disappear on you. You're not just going to all of a sudden find yourself out in the wilderness. No way! You leave your first love one step at a time.

You harden your heart as the days and circumstances go by. You make those choices to not yield to the grace of God and rather to take a cold, hard heart. You make those choices whether you're an individual or whether it's a church.

And oh, listen, that ought to make us tremble as churches that are represented here tonight. That ought to make us tremble. Because we can make those choices and lose the fire and lose the love.

And oh, it's very deceptive, you know, because we know what to do, so we keep on going with the patience and the labor and discerning what is evil. And we go on with all those things, but the fire isn't burning anymore. And we kind of console ourselves, you know.

We're standing for right. And you know in this evil day that we live in, we console ourselves, but all the time, the fire is not burning there anymore. And when you consider the words of Jesus there in Matthew 16, on this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

As I understand that promise, brothers and sisters, nothing short of vital reality, nothing short of a flame of love for Jesus is what builds the church of Jesus Christ upon the earth. So when that flame starts going out, we're in serious trouble. Whether it's me as an individual, or whether it's my church, we're in serious trouble.

Notice what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus. Remember! Remember! Do you remember, my friend? Do you remember that flame of love in your heart? Do you remember how free you were? Do you remember how much you loved Jesus? Do you remember how you couldn't keep your mouth shut? Do you remember some of the dumb things you did while you were trying to tell others about Jesus because you were so excited and so much in love? Do you remember? It's good to remember. That was the first thing Jesus said.

Now consider what He meant by that after we looked at the history of this church. Remember Ephesus. Remember the miracles in your midst.

Remember the powerful things that happened. Remember the bonfire in downtown Ephesus. Remember Ephesians.

Remember, remember, remember what I did when you loved me in your simplicity, when you were just my disciples, when you loved me with all your heart. Remember what I did. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent.

Repent. Repent. And then He doesn't stop there, but He says after you've repented, do the first works.

Do you know what that means? The way it was back there, do it again! All those prayer meetings you had, do them again! All that witnessing you did, go do it again! All that boldness you had in the community, do it again! Go do your first works, Ephesus. Go do your first works. Or else.

God puts an or else in there. That's pretty sobering, you know. God is no respecter of persons or churches.

It doesn't matter what you did back there. God doesn't look on and say, oh, it was such a good church. I'm not going to judge it like others.

No. God says to the most powerful church in Asia, or else. Or else.

I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. But what happens to him who doesn't overcome? He doesn't get to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. That's what happens to him who doesn't overcome.

You're sitting here this evening. I don't know where you're at with God. I don't know what there is between you and God.

Maybe you're like we talked about the other evening. You're walking through your life, you know, like this. You know, it's just kind of a cloudy life for you.

You're walking down through life and things aren't very well. You're going on with your religion and you're trying to read your Bible and be a good Christian and go to church and all the while there's a cloud over your head and you're trying to pray and heaven is brass and you go to church and you don't get much out of the sermons and you go to the prayer meeting and listen to everybody else pray because you don't have anything that flows out of your own heart and you know there's something wrong. What are you going to do about it? Jesus says, Overcome! Overcome! And maybe you're here tonight and you've never been born again, but you've been sitting in this atmosphere for the last few days and you say, Oh my, I don't have what these people have.

I'm telling you, I don't have what all these people have. All this joy and all this fellowship and everybody's talking about Jesus and man. I don't have this.

Oh listen, my friend, you just need to get born again. That's all. That's all that's wrong.

You just need to be born again and you can get born again tonight. God will give you that opportunity. You can get born again tonight.

Thou hast left thy first love. You are not where you used to be. You are not where you used to be, oh church.

Whichever church it is, I don't know. I'm sure there are churches represented here. I'm sure there are.

You're not where you used to be. If you are not where you used to be, there's only one grace for you. That is, it's time to seek the Lord until He come and reign righteousness upon us again.

That's the only grace for you. If you walk out of here and go home, back to business as usual, I tremble. I tremble.

They lost their first love. They left it. How? Maybe they just were busy being a big gospel center.

Maybe they just got too busy. You know, you can get busy in God's work and lose the fire. You know that? You can do that.

That first love is the foundation of the conditional promise that Jesus made in Matthew 16. That's it. Remember? Remember? Remember your first love? Remember how excited you were? Remember how thrilled you were? Remember.

Repent. And do the first works. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.

That's how it happens. That's it. Remember how you received Christ Jesus the Lord? Remember your repentance? Remember your brokenness? Remember your openness? Remember your honesty? Remember your desperation? Remember how you thought, well, I have no hope.

I'm without God in the world. Remember the desperation? Do the first works. As you have received Christ Jesus, in the same way that you received Christ Jesus, so walk ye in Him.

And if you will walk in Him that way, you will be rooted and grounded in love and established in the faith. That's what Paul said to the Colossian church in chapter 2. Which, by the way, was a church that Paul never went to. But it was a church that was started by the church at Ephesus.

Well, this evening, we leave this challenge, this enlightenment to our hearts as we have considered principles of church in the New Testament. We've looked to see how God builds a church. We've looked to see what God wants the church to be like.

We've looked at a beautiful example of the influence of a church here this evening. I just wonder where you're at tonight. I can't give an invitation to a church because I don't know who's here tonight.

I know there's lots of people here that are scattered along the hillside, all around this area. Some of you don't even have a church. Some of you had a church, but you don't have one anymore.

Some of you tried churches until you got tired of churches and you're just sitting there at home. So I don't know who I'm talking to this evening. But I do know this.

I'm talking to individuals. And I just wonder where you're at with the Lord tonight. Where you're at.

I want to give an invitation tonight. And this is an old-fashioned invitation. You know what those are? You know, they used to have tents and they put sawdust all over the place and you walked the sawdust trail.

Well, tonight I'm going to ask you to slip your way down here on this wet floor and kneel up here on this wet floor and get right with God. We don't have any sawdust up here. We just have some wet floor.

But you know what? The people who were serious with God when there was sawdust on the tent floor, they could care less. Is thy heart right with God? Washed in the crimson flood. Cleansed and made holy.

Humble and right in... Is it? Let's bow our heads for prayer. Father in heaven, in Jesus' name, we come crying to you tonight, God, for the needy ones that are among us. O Lord, O Lord, who walks in the midst of the churches, walk in the midst of this assembly tonight and convict the hearts of those who have lost their first love, God, and convict the hearts of those who are not born again, Father.

Maybe we've got some of our young people here, Lord. They've never given their heart to thee, God. We pray for them.

O Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on this meeting right now, God, with convicting power. God, I pray, you'll save the souls of those who need to be saved and you will cleanse the hearts of those who have lost their way. I trust the invitation into your care in Jesus Christ's name I pray.

Amen. What's the song of invitation, Kenny? Number 44 in your book. If you have a need, I want you just to come to the front.

Just come up here and kneel. This is the altar tonight. Come and kneel before the Lord.

Let it be an altar before the Lord. You just come. If you have a need, you come, while we sing number 44.

I am outwardly, but that Thy blood was shed.

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