

(7 Churches) Ephesus, Left First Love?

by Mark Greening

The book of Revelation is a message from God to His people, calling them to repentance and holiness, and warning them of the imminency of Christ's return.

Duration: 52:03

Scripture: Revelation 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Discernment", "First Love"

Description

Mark Greening emphasizes the message to the church of Ephesus from Revelation, highlighting their hard work and perseverance but also their critical failure of leaving their first love for Christ. He warns that busyness in ministry does not equate to spiritual health and urges believers to remember, repent, and return to their initial passion for Jesus. Greening illustrates the importance of love in the Christian life, stating that true faith must express itself through love for God and others. He concludes with a call to be overcomers, reminding the congregation that Jesus is coming soon and urging them to be ready.

Transcript

This morning when Grant met me, he reminded me, he said, Mark, don't you forget you're speaking today. And Grant's concern for me reminded me of a story. Years ago, I was asked to be a guest speaker at a church in Mississauga, and as I drove into the parking lot, I was stunned.

I thought, this is revival. The parking lot was jam-packed. It was hard for me to find a parking place.

I thought, the Lord has already gone before, has answered my prayer that God would prepare hearts and bring those who were to come and hear the message. And I walked in, and I'm telling you, there was just a place in the back, one place in the back where I could sit. The place was packed out.

I was so excited, I sat down, only to hear the fellow at the front stand and pronounce the benediction. It was daylight savings, and I was an hour late. So, it did my heart good to come in this morning and see the parking lot almost empty and to find a place to sit where I normally sit.

If God wanted me to do that, He'd have to write it on a scroll and lower it down from heaven for me to read. And so, I've heard some people say in the past to me. This morning, I actually want to read from the scroll of the book of Revelation that John wrote.

He did not receive a scroll from heaven. Rather, He was taken up by Jesus into heaven. And Jesus said to him in verse 11 of chapter 1, which we'll read shortly, write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.

We will be reading through chapter 1 and into chapter 2 regarding the church of Ephesus this morning. And in a real sense, this is a scroll that has come down to us from heaven. It's a scroll with a message for each one of us here this morning.

And the Holy Spirit Himself says to us in chapter 2 verse 7, He says, He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Now, before we look at the message that God has for each one of us this morning, I want to set the stage with some background on who John the author of Revelation was. John was one of Jesus's 12 disciples.

You remember Jesus had a nickname for them. They were the sons of thunder. And there was not a better example of that than when Jesus was on His way with His disciples down through Samaria into Jerusalem.

And when the Samaritans heard that He was going to Jerusalem, they were so offended. And they wouldn't allow Him to come through that town. And so James and John said, Lord, let us call down fire from heaven on them.

And Jesus had to rebuke them. They were sons of thunder. According to tradition, John was the only one of the 12 disciples.

Judas was replaced by Matthias. So there were 12 disciples. He's the only one that did not die a martyr's death.

And from all we can gather, he lived into his late 90s. And some people even speculate into his early 100s. It's estimated that somewhere between 60 AD and 70 AD, John went to Ephesus with Mary, Jesus's mother, to settle there and to teach and to preach.

You remember Jesus from the cross. He looked down at Mary. And He said to her, Woman, behold your son, pointing to John.

And to John He says, And son, behold your mother. And John was faithful to take care of Mary. And he brought her down to Ephesus.

And that's where, according to tradition, she passed away in her old age. The apostle Paul had established the church in Ephesus around 60 AD on one of his missionary journeys. And he spent three years there planning that church, discipling, raising up leaders.

It was the longest time that he spent in any one of the cities where he established a church. And John lived there. And he ended up preaching and teaching and discipling that church in Ephesus.

And one of the clearest evidences that John actually lived in Ephesus, if people are wondering about that, comes from a quote from Polycarp. Polycarp is referred to as one of the early church fathers. So after the disciples lived and the apostles lived and died, the first people who took over from their ministry, they were called the early church fathers.

So Polycarp happened to be one of John's disciples. So in Ephesus, where John taught, Polycarp was there as a young man. And he would take him out to Tim Hortons.

And he would do Bible studies with him. And he would mentor and disciple Polycarp. And so Polycarp became a great expositor of the truth, a defender of the faith.

But anyways, one day Polycarp was relating to Irenaeus, who also became an early church father, who wrote this down. And Irenaeus wrote down what Polycarp said about John and the city of Ephesus. And I quote, Polycarp said this, John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus and perceiving Cyrenthus within.

By the way, Cyrenthus was a false prophet, a false teacher. And John had nothing to do with him. And the church avoided him like the plague.

And so Polycarp said, and John perceiving Cyrenthus within, rushed out of the bathhouse without bathing, exclaiming, let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down. Because Cyrenthus, the enemy of the truth, is within. So once a son of thunder, always a son of thunder.

He was always fiery like that. And that is how we know that John for sure preached in Ephesus. Apart from tradition, we have Polycarp's statement.

But Ephesus was the capital of that province in the Roman Empire. It was a key trading center. It was a famous seaport.

It was a wealthy cosmopolitan city. But it was one of the most pagan places in the world. As a matter of fact, the temple of Diana was there, quite a large temple.

And one of the most pagan, hideous idols of that time was there, given a central place in the temple. It was the idol of Artemis, which allegedly came down from heaven. Actually in Acts 19, Paul refers to that legend.

It's not true. But he talks to them about that. And anyway, so here this idol of Artemis was there.

And people would go to worship. And the city was, it was corrupt. A lot of tourists came there because this was one of the seven wonders of the world, although they didn't know it at the time.

But it was a fabulous building when you look at the drawings and the archaeological finds. And they would come there to worship. So it was filled with criminals, scammers, lots of prostitution, especially temple prostitution, because that's how they worshiped their god.

I think Pastor Richard talked about this a few weeks ago. Now that was part of the pagan ritual, worship through prostitution. And this is where the Church of Ephesus was.

And at that time, immorality was so rampant that it was not uncommon for men to have two or three mistresses whom they housed in the same house as their wife and children. That's how immoral the city was. And of course, the Church's message of holiness and turning from idolatry, greed, and immorality was not a popular one.

And so eventually, a great persecution a few decades later broke out in the city of Ephesus. And John was rounded up because he was one of the key figures there in Ephesus. And they banished him to the Isle of

Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

And he was banished around 90 AD. Now today, you can still take tours if you want to go see where John allegedly wrote in that cave. They say they know where it is.

And they give tours. And I don't know how much it cost. But you can go there and see where it is.

And the rock that's split that represents the Trinity, it's quite a thing that they have going there in terms of those tours. But it's still there on the Isle of Patmos. Now, if you could just put up the first verse that we'll read through.

What I want to do is I want to read through and comment on these verses as I go. So, verse 1 of Revelation chapter 1, we read, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw.

That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one, verse 3, who reads the word of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it.

Because the time is near. So, here we are only three verses deep into the book of Revelation. And already we're being blessed by being here this morning.

And Jesus says that not only are we blessed, but we will be blessed, even more blessed, having heard these words if we put them into practice as God shows us what's in our hearts today. It's an important message, verse 3, because what? The time is near. Thank you worship team for choosing those songs.

You didn't even know what I was going to be preaching on this morning, but the time is near. Now, I've had a lot of people tell me, especially young people and young adults, they've told me this, Mark, every generation has believed that they're in the last days. And to a certain extent that's true.

But you know what? When I was growing up as a teenager, way back when, when I, back in the days before we had those dumb smartphones, you know, I mean back then, you know, we'd have traveling preachers come in and people do conferences on prophecy and that. And you know what? When they talk about the imminency of Christ's return, and that is a wonderful doctrine in the New Testament, I couldn't connect the dots because I couldn't understand how a one world monetary system, a one world religion, a one world government, this one world mark, number, could be rolled out with the current infrastructure that we had in the 1970s and 1980s. I mean, in 1980, computers were just starting to revolutionize the business world, not even personal life.

And the internet wasn't even usable to a large extent until 1990, when they started to come out with GUI interfaces and Netscape and all of that. But today, with what is called the IOT, the internet of things, everything is connected. I mean, every computer and database basically in the world has access to its information and is shared.

I mean, you have smart watches, you've got smart devices, you've got cars that can be driven and controlled, even programmed in advance before you get in them by the inter, over the internet. You've got, for goodness sakes, I was looking on the internet, I found a smart crock pot, Wi-Fi enabled, an internet of things, a crock pot. Why do you need to access your crock pot when you're at work on a, I mean, it's gone crazy.

The whole world is connected, and add to this the exponential growth of AI, along with the destruction of all language barriers due to instantaneous translation software. And we have achieved what the Lord warned about during the construction of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, 6, where we read, if as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. And what was once impossible is now possible, because there has been this technological breakdown, not only of the communication barrier, but also of the financial and governmental barriers that once divided us.

Specifically since 2020, nations around the world, including Canada itself, have been slowly and surely been relinquishing their autonomy and sovereignty to the UN, the World Economic Forum, and the World Health Organization, to name a few. Nothing is keeping the Lord from coming back today. Everything is now in place, technologically, financially, and governmentally, for the new world order and the Antichrist system to begin.

Verse 3 says, the time is near. Verse 4, John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. So Jesus wrote to seven churches, but this scroll that he wrote, this letter is an open letter to every church, including CCF this morning.

That's why after each commendation or exhortation to these seven churches, he says, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Verse 4, grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. And from the seven spirits before his throne.

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. So why do we need to read and listen to what is being said in Revelation this morning? Because Jesus loves us.

And everything we read in this scroll of Revelation, everything we read in the Bible is for our own good. Verse 6, and has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve as God and Father. To him be glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be. Amen. Verse 8, I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who was, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's day, I was in the spirit. And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said, write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Now notice what Jesus is interested right now in this world. What's he interested in? He's not interested in the stock market. He's not interested in who's going to win the next election.

He's not interested in who's going to win the next pennant, the Stanley Cup, the Gray Cup, the Rose Bowl. He's not interested in these things. He's interested in the churches.

We are the light of the world. We are the salt of the earth. We are his body.

He is the head. We are his hands and feet. And whatever Jesus wants to accomplish in this world, by and large, he does through his church, through us, through his people.

And when people start maturing in Christ, they care about the church. They care about who's getting saved, who's going to be getting baptized, who's struggling financially, who's lonely, who's discouraged, who's in need of a ride to church, who needs something done in their home, who needs help with one of their children, one of their erring children. Maybe there's some rebellion.

Maybe there's a child, a teenager going down a wrong path. And we notice that. And as husbands and wives or as friends, we're willing to jump into the fray and do something and help them out somehow.

We ask ourselves, who can I invite over for hospitality? Who can I take out for coffee? Jesus said, in that we did these things for the least of these, we did it for Christ. That's why Jesus said one day he's going to separate the sheep from the goats and he'll say, depart from me, I never knew you. But we knew you, Lord.

He says, yes, you knew me, but you never opened up your wallet. You never opened up your heart. You never opened up your home and ministered to me by loving those in the church you attended.

Depart from me, I never knew you. Next slide, verse 12. I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.

And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest. And the last picture we have of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation is that he's walking amongst the churches.

Now it's interesting, he doesn't talk about how big they were, what their numbers, their attendance were, how many services they had. He doesn't talk about the style of their business, their building, the style of their worship. He doesn't talk about how many people sang, whether one person led swing in his hand or whether there was a worship team up front.

He didn't talk about whether or not they met in homes, what kind of lighting and instruments they had. God doesn't look at numbers. You see, Scripture says, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

Did you know that Jesus knows about CCF? He walks in our midst. He knows where you sit. He knows what your favorite songs are.

He knows how many cookies we're going to sneak at the back after. Next slide, verse 14. His head and his hair were like white wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last.

I am the living one. I was dead, and behold, I'm alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write therefore what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later.

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and of the seven golden lampstands is this. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. The stars in Jesus's hand are the angels in Greek, and so the seven church, the seven messengers, the seven angels are the pastors of those churches, the teaching elders of those churches.

That's what they're referring to. And these are letters that are encouraging to the pastors and the churches, and some of the churches. Some of them are exhortational, but one thing we learn not only from this passage but elsewhere, especially the gospels as well, is that Jesus was not politically correct.

He wasn't woke. He tells us not what we want to hear. He tells us what we need to hear, and in Psalm 141 5 he says, let a righteous man strike me, it is a kindness.

Now who's more righteous than Jesus? And can we take an exhortation from him if and when he gives it to us as we read or come to church Sunday by Sunday? You know, I've had to go, I've never been in more hospitals and doctor's offices as this last year. I was telling one doctor, the last time I was in the hospital was when I got spanked when I was born. That was it.

I mean, I have in 65 years, I've met in my 66th year, I'm always there. I go to the doctor, and they're looking at this eye, and by the way, thank you for praying for my eye. Every week it's getting better.

I can actually read some of the words on the screen today. So God is answering prayer. Keep praying, but I'll go.

I'll say, doc, what's with my eye? He'll say, I want to tell you, this eye you've got. Oh, stop. I don't want to hear about my eye, I want to hear about my left leg.

Well, what's wrong with your left leg? Nothing. That's why I want to hear about it. I want to hear good news today.

I've heard bad news for a whole year about everything else, every other part of my body. I want a good news. No, we want to know what is the bad news if there is something to know.

And a lot of churches these days want their ears tickled. They don't want real talk. That's why God doesn't care about numbers.

Some of the largest churches in North America right now are apostate, and they teach false doctrine Sunday after Sunday, and people think they're great. They read their books. They buy their books.

And one church in particular, and if I told you, you'd know it. I'm not telling tales out of school. I don't have to name the name, but he preaches on it.

I heard him preach it this past week. He says, we've unhitched the Old Testament from the New Testament. Why would they do that? Because in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as righteous and holy and just, and he punishes people, and he shakes and bakes them sometimes because they're disobeying him.

And so, we don't want to portray a God like that who wiped out nations and that because they were so corrupted and impure, and the genetic line was even corrupted with demonic angels, the Nephilim. We don't want to hear about that stuff. What we do want to hear about is everything in the New Testament where Jesus comes across very often as loving and caring and merciful and forgiving and dying for our

sins.

But the problem is that omitting to tell and speak of all of God's truth, including his holiness and his judgment and his justice and his righteousness, as well as his love and mercy and grace, by omitting the hard things in the scripture, it is as bad as teaching false doctrine. Jesus said that a little yeast leavens the whole lump, and eventually a half-truth gospel puts congregations, even large ones, to sleep spiritually. Next slide.

Chapter two, verse one. 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.

Now every letter to the seven churches, we're only looking at Ephesus today, starts with the words, I know. Jesus knows everything. He knows your deeds, who you've given a cup of cold water to, who you visited, who you've had over for dinner, who have you witnessed to, who you've encouraged, who you've prayed for, how you've sacrificed financially for him.

I know everything, he says. Everything you've done, good, bad, or indifferent. I know your hard work, he says.

You're going the second mile. This church at Ephesus was a really good church. They really put their nose to the grindstone.

They really went the second mile. I know about your perseverance, putting up with difficult circumstances, and sometimes even difficult people. There is a letter here to CCF right now.

It's not in the Bible, but God knows it. Verse two, 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. You have tested those who claim to be apostles.

We need spiritual discernment in the church now more than ever. There's all kinds of people running around claiming to be prophets these days. I have heard them, especially, maybe I'm just more sensitive to it since 2020 and the pandemic, but I have, and the American elections.

I have heard so many men who are held up in high esteem. They sell books. They're all over the internet with millions of views proclaiming that Trump was going to win in 2020.

How can that be? And no one is exhorting them. In the Old Testament, the true test of a prophet was this, 100% accuracy, 100% of the time. Otherwise, it was the rock concert for them.

They were stoned. That's what it was. They had to have 100% accuracy, 100% of the time.

How many prophecies did I hear? We're going to pray. I remember saying, well, we're praying right now and God's given me the authority to absolutely stamp out COVID in the world. And he proclaimed that and prayed that and guess what? Nothing happened.

I have heard prophecies about revivals in specific places that were going to happen, this event, that catastrophe, and they didn't come true. Jesus says, I know that you have tested prophets, those who call themselves prophets, and they've been false. John said prior to the book of Revelation when he wrote in 1 John chapter 4 verse 1, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So we need discernment. Next slide, verse 3. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Not grown weary despite the debauchery of that city.

Yet, verse 4, I hold this against you, you have forsaken your first love. Now this is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible because I hear a lot of Christians saying that someone lost their first love. But that's not what happened here.

The Ephesians didn't lose their first love, they actually left their first love. If you lose something, you frantically look for it. But they didn't lose it, they just left it down willfully someplace.

They laid it down and they walked away from it. Something else was creeping in. They left, not lost their first love.

They started to live for themselves. They started to get involved in their own hobbies, to spend time watching their favorite series on Netflix, even working overtime when they didn't really need to. Their priorities moved from doing things that earn them rewards of gold, silver, and precious stone to that which God considers wood, hay, and stubble.

Kindling for the fire that one day God will set fire to and test the works of every man. Now the question here is, do you think it was they left their first love for the Lord or for other people? Doesn't matter. Both lead to the same thing.

1st John 4 20 says, for whoever does not love their brother and sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. Galatians 5 verse 6, and I want you to fill in this verse. I'm going to just quote part of it.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. What is it? The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. If someone that you've heard about but you've never met personally came to you and said, you know what, I want to give you 10 million dollars cash in your bank account right now, a brand new home, a brand new car, and I'm doing that just because I love you.

What would you do? Would we just stand there looking blinking? Would we be scrolling through our phone like this, ignoring them? We would express our appreciation to them in any way we knew how. If we were British, we might shake their hand. If we're French background like me, you'd kiss them on both cheeks.

But we would somehow, some way, express our love for them. The natural response towards someone who loves us is that we want to display our love tangibly to them as well. And Jesus has done immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

Even while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. First Peter 3 18 says, for you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. Do you know what hurts Jesus? It hurts him when he loves us so much after all he's done for us, and he's got so much prepared for us in heaven, and we don't love him back, and we don't love his people back.

And what is so ironic here is that despite having left their first love, they were still involved in ministry and in churchy things. Verse 2, I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. What a warning to us that busyness should never be equated with holiness, that God is more interested in what we are than what we do.

So what's the solution? Next verse, verse 5. Repent or remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and I'm going to put another R in here, repeat. Remember, repent, and repeat.

Do the things you did at first. Well remember what? Well remember how excited we were when we first got saved, and we would read our Bible, and we would spend time praying, and we'd go to church, and we'd spend time with other Christians. We obeyed what it says.

Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some, and some people do that, but don't do that. You get together with people. It's not about you, it's about them, it's about me.

That's what God says. Remember how you used to witness, and tell others about what Jesus had done for you. Remember all the verses that you memorized, and the time you just spent worshiping the Lord, and thanking Him.

Even as you walked and drove along, you just, your heart was filled with joy for the Lord. So we first, we have to remember, and then we have to repent. Well what does repent mean? It just means admitting to God what He already knows about us.

I mean He's already been through our sanctuary. He's walked among us this morning. The scroll came down and told us.

He's walking among us, and all we have to do is just tell Him, Lord you know. I'm just telling you what you already know. I don't love you as much as I used to, but I don't want to be like that anymore.

I want to return. I want to repent Lord. And then what do we do? We return, and Nike says it best.

Just do it. Just do it. Go back.

Jesus says, and do the things you did at first. I can't say what those things were in each one of your lives. I have a general idea, because I know what it was in my life.

But the Lord is asking us to consider what has come down from heaven on a scroll today for us to read. And He says, I want you to consider, to remember, to repent, to return. I want you to do that.

Verse 5. Let me read that again. If you do not repent, I'll come to you and remove your lampstand, which refers to their witness. I'll remove your lampstand, your witness from your community, Ephesus, from its place.

History bears witness to the fact that the church at Ephesus, the strongest, most respected church in the New Testament, went into decline after failing to heed what was written in this scroll. Today, the ancient city of Ephesus is in modern-day Turkey, and only 2% are Christian, if you could even call them Christian, and they're declining as I speak. The light has gone out, never to come on again.

What if it had never gone out? The city of Ephesus that's talked about in Acts chapter 19, where there was such a powerful revival and conviction that the people, the Bible says, came and brought 50,000 drachmas. That was 50,000 pieces of silver, equivalent in our money of about 10 million dollars today. And they burned it.

They repented. They said, we don't want to keep these things in our home anymore. We want Jesus to be glorified.

We love you, Jesus, more than we love these things in the world that held their attention and affection for so long, and we're going to burn them. This past week, I bumped into someone in Staples in Simcoe, and the Lord laid on my heart to start talking to them. The woman introduced herself to me as a witch.

She says, I'm the real McCoy. I put curses on homes. People come to me, and I opened up to Deuteronomy 18, and I showed her that anyone who does these things--practice sorcery, witchcraft, divination--are detestable to the Lord.

And I said to her, unless you burn those things, you will be going to hell. They will take you to hell. She was stunned.

There was someone else in the store. They're looking at me. Who is this guy telling you this? I'm just ready.

I'm all revved up, ready to preach this in Acts 19. And she says, but they cost me so much money. Six thousand dollars I have in all of this.

I said, I would rather get rid of that and be saved than to have that and go to hell for it. She says, you're a Christian? I said, yes. She says, where were you Christians when I first got into witchcraft? I said, we were there, but you weren't ready to hear it.

But now you are. She says, I know. She says, you know, you're the third Christian in two days that has come to me and told me to believe in Jesus and repent.

She says, I can't burn this. I said, you must. I said, give me your text or your telephone number.

I'll text you. For the next six hours, once I got home, I was texting her for six hours. And at the end, she says, Mark, I've had a breakthrough.

I am burning all of my books tonight. I have become a Christian this afternoon. But you see, when the scroll comes down, it came down to her.

And she got convicted. She says, you know what? I would rather love Jesus. And you know what she said? She texted me.

I should pull up some texts and read them. She says, I have never felt so much love in my life. I feel every second the love of Jesus in my life now.

I am so loved by Him. And she loved Him so much and felt so much love coming from Him. She didn't care about that \$6,000 and she burned it.

And who would ever have thought that the land where the witness of that church burned so brightly would be where it is today where the light is so completely out. And what a warning to us who have the truth to walk in obedience to it. What are the symptoms of this kind of church? Good deeds, hard work, perseverance.

They didn't tolerate wicked men. They persevered under hardships. But despite all of these things, God overlooked them because those good points were of less value to Him.

They were valueless to Him actually because of their lack of love for the Lord. And when the Lord said that they had left their first love, He was referring to those feelings of love and gratitude that a new Christian has. Next slide, verse 6. But you have this in your favor.

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. Why did they leave their first love? Possibly because they were battling, among other things, the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans, by the way, and we won't go into much detail, the long and the short was they preached that it was okay to be involved in immorality and they taught idolatry.

It was okay to mix the two. And so they hated that in the church of Ephesus. And they were striving for doctrinal purity.

And that's important. Scripture warns about false teaching spreading and false teachers spreading doctrines taught by demons. But that's always the danger when we begin to fight and contend with each other, whether it be for a good cause or not, is that a lack of love often sets in.

And the contending for the truth can be contending for truth in our society. If you were to ask me, Mark, you just turned 66 and as you look back over your past six decades, what shocks you most about the time we live in? I would say this, three words, lies, deception, and tyranny. We live in a society where we are constantly bombarded by lies from our mainstream media, from financial institutions, including the Bank of Canada, from our medical institutions, from Big Pharma, from environmental agencies, from the WHO, the World Economic Forum, the UN, and elitist societies, just to name a few.

Just let me ask you a question. This week I read it again. I was reading the financial news in the Toronto Star and the Bank of Canada announced that we are experiencing 3.3% inflation.

How many of you believe that you're only paying 3.3% more for your food, your gas, your rent if you're renting, your clothing, things on Amazon, any utilities, my utilities. I can't believe it. I live in a smaller house and I've almost doubled my utilities for the green energy and climate change and all of this.

Come on, three and a half percent, that's a bold-faced lie. We are bombarded by lies all around. Now, there's nothing wrong with exposing these lies, but the danger is that we can get so focused on the author of these lies that we lose sight of the author of truth and the author of love.

And when even if we're doing that and exposing all of these lies, which by the way, I'll expose them when I need to, but if that becomes my hobby horse, you know what, I'll be so focused on being angry at them that I won't love you, right? Next slide, verse 7. He who has an ear, that's us, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. In other words, blessed are those who hear and take to heart what has been said. That's what Revelation 1-3 started us off as.

Verse 7, to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. Now, there's many descriptions of Christians in the Bible, the light of the world, the salt of the earth, soldiers of Christ, but in Revelation, the true believer is described as an overcomer. What does it mean to be an overcomer? 1 John 5-4, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.

What is in the world? In the context of this passage, it's anything that robs us from the first love we had for Jesus when we got saved. Let me just give you a description of the world from 1 John. Again, John who wrote Revelation, wrote the book of 1 John.

In chapter 2-16, we read, for everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life comes not from the Father but from the world. Let's quickly look at these in closing. The lust of the flesh, it's comforts that pander to our bodies that we feel that we can't live without, things we do that make us feel good, and all of these things, almost all, not all of them, but many of these things are good, but if they're taken to excess, they become bad for us.

You know that every sin in the world is something good that has been misused, exaggerated, overdone, nothing wrong with sex in marriage, but look at the immorality. Is sex good? The Bible says the bed is not defiled, but misused, it is wrong. And so comforts, things that give us pleasure, it can be overeating, it can be drinking alcohol in excess, it can be drugs, it can be pills that we take because rather than allowing the Lord to calm us, we want something else to do it.

It can be smoking, it can be anything to dull the pain, to help us make it through the day, anything apart from the Lord, it doesn't matter. That's the lust of the flesh. The lust of the eyes, the most obvious is lust itself, struggling with what the world calls eye candy.

Job said, I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a woman, and how rampant pornography has become. As I've told you before, I used to run a technology company, at a computer company, so I would interface with a lot of businessmen and church leaders, because they got to know that I did that kind of work. And I cannot tell you how many times I would have a business machine come in, or an executive's laptop, or a Christian leader's computer come in and it wasn't working.

And back then we used to have cache files, no one knew about them hardly, unless you're in IT, you didn't know. And I could go in to see what they were looking at, and why the machine crashed. I cannot tell you how many times I found hardcore porn on these machines.

Is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit could not work through the ministries of those men doing that? Oh, it looked good, hard work, perseverance. But the fruit, where was the fruit? There was no fruit. Lust of the eyes.

Lust of the eyes is desiring anything that you think that will make you happier, that you don't have. Eve looked at that fruit, and the Lord, and the devil says, it will make you smarter. She wanted to be smarter, she ate the fruit.

And we can lust after homes, and cars, and clothing, or possessions. And then when we achieve those things, we want better ones. 1st Timothy 6, 6, But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation, and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Some people eager for money have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs. And a sure sign of lust of the eyes is when we're not content with the things that we have. Lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, pride of life.

Third, pride of life. Mostly this comes from the pride of our own achievements, our education, our skills, our talents, our gifting, even our looks. I mean, if you're good looking, why are you proud? You did nothing to get it.

We can be proud of all kinds of things. Verse 7, To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. And the tree of life is first referred to in Genesis 2 verse 9, where it was lost due to man's sin.

But this heavenly tree of life is referred to four times in the book of Revelation, and it symbolizes eternal life. To him who overcomes, I want us to go with this thought. If we overcome, proving ourselves to be Christians, we have the right to eat from the tree of life.

If we claim to be saved, then the Holy Spirit enables us to become overcomers. One struggle, one sin, one bondage at a time. Back to my opening sentence.

If God wanted me to do that, He would have to write it on a scroll and lower it down for heaven for me to read. We have read that scroll this morning. The scroll has told us in verse 3 that we're blessed if we read it, and hear it, and obey it.

The scroll has told us this morning that Jesus is coming soon. Are you ready? Christ's coming could happen today at noon. I've told you, I've been in technology.

I have seen how things have evolved in technology. There is nothing technologically stopping us from having a one world government financial system, mark of the beast, tomorrow. Nothing.

Nothing. Just 2 Thessalonians 2 that says the restrainer, when the restrainer, the Holy Spirit is removed, then the man of lawlessness will come on the scene. It's only the Holy Spirit.

It's only by God's grace that it doesn't happen at noon today or tomorrow. It could come any time. Christ could come any time.

This morning I was woken up, and I wasn't planning on saying this, but I think the Lord just added this footnote. He said, you talk about this. You remember in Matthew 24, a great passage about the Lord's coming, and it talks about two men will be in a field.

One will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken, the other left.

We go along that theme to chapter 25, and he talks about ten virgins. Five wise, five foolish. The five wise were ready with their lamps trimmed and extra oil, and when the bridegroom came, he took them, but the other five, realizing they didn't have enough oil, went off to look for it, and they missed the bridegroom when he arrived.

And it says, Jesus says, that the five virgins went with Jesus, and then he shut the door, and the other five foolish came, and they knocked on the door, and they said, sir, open the door for us. And we read that Jesus said, I tell you the truth. I don't know you.

Would you say that Jesus is the ultimate mathematician? You think he can add and do simple... How about this? 50 percent. Do we understand what 50 percent, one out of two is? What if in these three instances, what Jesus was saying, is that when I come, only 50 percent of my church is going to be ready for me. I trust by God's grace and the mercy of God, that 100 percent of us this morning is ready.

I was... I prayed. You haven't heard my previous sermon on my testimony. You listened to it.

I thought I was ready. Had Jesus come, I was not ready. I would have been left.

Oh, I had to... I even preached, for goodness sakes. I was not ready. You know why? I was not an overcomer.

I could call myself... I... salt of the earth... I was not an overcomer. I would not let go of sins. And God says, why will you die, oh Israel? He used to tell me that.

Until one day I said, Lord, I am going to repent. I am going to get rid of. I am going to burn.

I'm going to get rid of this stuff. I'm going to stop listening to the world. I'm not going to love the things of the world.

The music I used to love. The books I used to read. Anything I was involved in.

I'm getting rid of it all, because I love you more than these things. Because you love me so much, that even while I was still a sinner, you died for me. The scroll has told us this morning, also, against leaving our first love.

We have to remember, repent, and return. Now, maybe you've never had that experience of a first love for Jesus before, but that can change today. The Bible is simple.

If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that Christ has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Lastly, the scroll says that if we're overcomers, and that is a description of a true Christian, that we'll eat from the tree of life one day in heaven.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you in Jesus' name. And Lord, not one of us is worthy to be saved by you.

We are all sinners. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And that the penalty of sin is death.

Eternal death in hell. But God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Your word says you must be born again. And Lord, we know that when we are truly born again by the spirit of God, we become overcomers. We can't help but that do that because Jesus greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world.

All these things that have bound us to this morning, you are greater than those things. Having disarmed the powers and authorities, you made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Satan has no more power over us.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, or will set us free this morning. And Heavenly Father, I pray that every single one of us can leave here today and know that if you were to come at six o'clock tonight, that we would be ready for you. That we wouldn't run back to CCF tonight to see or the next week to see who's still here.

Start calling through the directory to see if we were one of the ones that was left. Lord Jesus, have mercy on us. Open the eyes today, Lord.

Like you opened my eyes. I was a hypocrite. I couldn't overcome, but you helped me.

Because you said that when we believe, we become overcomers. And I pray that now by the power of the spirit of Almighty God, you descend upon us. And you would save any that are not saved.

That we would let go of those sins. Lord, we love you more than our sin. Oh God, have mercy on us.

Save us, we pray. Thank you Heavenly Father for what you've done. I thank you for my brothers and sister here.

Lord, this morning. Lord, bless us as we go. You promised to bless us just from reading and hearing this.

Bless us. Use us. Increase our love for you and one another.

For I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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