You have forsaken the love you had at first

Revelation 2:1-7

Key Verse 2:4

“**Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”**

Today’s message is about ‘the first love’. Have you experienced your first love? One day my daughter Martha asked me if I had my first love. I was embarrassed and I could not say much because I was not so sure which one was my first love. I felt awkward to say someone is my first love in front of Maria after living together for such a long time. I felt like it would insult her. So my answer was ‘No, I did not have my first love.” I felt Martha was disappointed after hearing what I said. But I did not ask her why she asked me the question. Still I don’t know. I sensed that maybe she was experiencing her first love or she was curious about to know if her father, who is a missionary, could have experienced such a thing called ‘first love’.

The word ‘first love’ is a popular topic of many stories and many people would love to hear them. But in today’s passage we are not talking about the first love with someone else but Jesus Christ. Have you had your first love for Christ? Most of us have such first love for Christ, the times when we were so moved by his love, and when we were ready to do anything including giving up our own lives for Christ. It was the time when we were so thankful for what he has done for us, that we thought about him all the time and we wanted to do anything for him. Arguably, that is generally our first love with Christ we experienced.

The church in Ephesus was excellent in many ways but Jesus said they forsook their first love for him. So today we want to learn how the church in Ephesus can restore their first love for Christ. We want to learn how we can also restore our first love for Christ.

**Part I. I know your deeds (v.1-3)**

Look at verse 1.

**“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.”**

Jesus is described as the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. “Seven stars” are the angels of the seven churches, and angels could refer to church leaders. “To hold seven stars in his right hand” could mean that Jesus had authority over seven churches especially the leaders of the churches. “Seven golden lampstands” are seven churches. ‘To walk among the seven golden lampstands’ shows that Jesus was shepherding over the seven churches. He was like a diligent shepherd who walks among his seven sheep and knows their spiritual conditions and makes sure that they grow in knowledge and grace.

Look at verses 2-3.

**“2I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.”**

Here, Jesus talked about their good deeds at first. Jesus said twice, “I know”. The word ‘know’ shows that Jesus had deep and personal knowledge of them. He really knew them to the core, and that is why he said, “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people.” They kept ‘zero tolerance policy’ to wicked people. Then they were even able to test false apostles and found them false. Therefore they did not fall into confusion and division because of their false teaching. This is one of their excellent jobs because the church of Pergamum suffered from the false teaching. Most of all, they have not grown weary after many years of persevering and enduring hardships for Jesus’ name. They were such an excellent church.

**Part II. Consider how far you have fallen (v.4-7)**

Look at verses 4-5.

**“4Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”**

Jesus found one thing that was lacking from them. It was the forsaking of their first love for him. Somehow and somewhere in the course of persevering and enduring many hardships they abandoned their first love for Jesus.

They were like the Israelites when God brought them out of the slavery of Egypt. At that time, they all shouted, “We will do everything you command us.” It was when they heard all the commands of God on the Mount of Sinai. But after they entered into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, they began to worship idols rather than the Lord who brought them out of the slavery in Egypt forgetting their first love and commitment.

In today’s passage the degree of the forsaking of their first love was so big that Jesus had to say to them, “Consider how far you have fallen!” The word ‘consider’ has the same meaning of ‘remember’. ‘Consider how far you have fallen’ means ‘remember how far you have fallen’ or ‘remember from where you have fallen.’

Then, Jesus said, “Repent and do the things you did at first.” The abandoning of their first love for Jesus was not just invisible. They did not do the things they had done at first.

What could be the things they had done at first but did not do at that time? We can find the answer when we think about what we do when we love someone. “When you love someone what do you do?” “When you love someone what do you want to do?” “Spending time with that person!” “Being thankful for whatever that person does for you.” “Bring gifts to that person like flowers or chocolate” “Say you love that person” “Thinking about that person all the time.” These are exactly what we will do when we love someone. And it applies to our love for Christ. When we love him we want to spend time with him. We want to bring our gifts to him. We want to say to him, “I love you”. We want to think about him all the time. We will be so thankful and praise him all the time. We want to work so hard to please him.

How can the church in Ephesus restore their first love for Christ? Are we better than the church in Ephesus? Probably not. How then can we restore our first love for Christ? It is by doing what we had been doing when we had first love for him. There are 3 things we can do to restore our first love for Christ. They are by spending time with him, and remembering what he has done for us, and serving others with the love of Christ.

Firstly, we can restore our first love for Christ by spending time with him. We need to spend time with him in order to listen to Him through his word and also speak to Him through prayer, sharing our hearts to Him. It is like daily devotion.

Wouldn’t you agree that our early morning time of prayer is rekindling our spirits, giving us a new burning heart of desire to restore our love relationship with God?

As I prayed in the morning together with other coworkers I felt newly alive and filled with great joy and happiness and eager expectation and thankfulness to God and to each person there. I felt united and I felt the presence of our Father, who I believe was with us and hearing our prayers.

I feel like I am going through healing process whenever I have joint prayers with other coworkers. Through each other’s prayer moved by the Spirit I feel like I am being healed during the time of prayer. Yesterday while I was exercising I was amazed at the amount of time of joint prayers these days. Overseers have joint prayer for 50 minutes. Then we have joint prayer with new disciples and our fellowship leaders and our church members at 5:30 am, and it takes about half an hour. Then we have 8 pm joint prayer meeting which takes about half an hour too. So I realized that I participated in joint prayers almost 2 hours a day. Then I have my personal prayer time. I realized God has already answered one of my 3 prayers topics this year. My 3 prayer topics based on my yearly key verse are to pray more than 1 hour a day and read the bible more than 1 hour a day and memorize daily bread key verse before going to bed. But God has already answered my prayer to pray more than 1 hour a day.

Now as I do how do I feel? Do I feel better? Absolutely! I became a happier man than anyone else. I feel the fire of the Holy Spirit arising in my heart, and in the hearts of other coworkers, and in the church. I never expected anyone would come to 3 times of joint prayer a day because that would be too much for any man who has a full time job. So I was surprised to see shepherd William coming to 8 pm prayer meeting every night. I don’t know how he could make 3 times of joint prayers a day. As you know he has a full time job, and he has 6 children and wife. But he has been doing it. Do I feel sorry for him? Absolutely not! I pray for the health of all my coworkers who come to prayer meetings because they have to sleep less. But I have no regrets at all that I invited them and they come because they themselves experience the powerful fire of the Holy Spirit which is the fire of their first love for Christ in their hearts. Praise God who has worked so powerfully among us to restore our first love for Christ through our joint prayers. Truly, to spend time with Christ through prayer and reading the word of God is the way for us to restore our first love for Christ.

Secondly, we can restore our first love for Christ by remembering what he has done for us.

One story can remind us of what the Lord has done for us. About one week ago, a father and mother saved their 9 years old son when they died in a desert of New Mexico. They came from France, but somehow they did not take enough water to drink when they went into the desert of national park in New Mexico. When they were in trouble the father and the mother gave two sips of water to their son in each time when they drank only one sip of water. Later both the father and the mother were dead because of heat but the son survived. The story shows how much they loved their son. Even at the cost of their own lives they loved their son and saved him. Their story reminds me of Jesus’ love for us.

Like the parents in the desert, Jesus sacrificed his life to save us. He was crucified in our own place, paying all the price of our sin. He was condemned in our place, and that was how he offered sin forgiveness for all of us. He was raised on the third day, breaking the power of death for us because we were slaves of fear because of death. In this way he gave his life for us in order to deliver us from sin and death. We need to remember it, focus on it, verbalize it, praise it, sing it aloud, pray it out loud and be thankful all the days of our life.

One father could restore his love for his daughter when he remembered how much his daughter loved him. He had a poor relationship with his daughter. He felt his daughter did not listen to him, and he could not bear her weaknesses many times. Sometimes he was afraid to have fellowship with her because he might have unexpected arguments or troubles with her which would make their relationship worse. But one day God opened his eyes to see how much his daughter bore his weaknesses. Time after time his daughter kept forgiving his mistakes. In the course of doing so she became sick and depressed. When God revealed this to him, he cried out. He realized Christ sent his daughter and his daughter bore all of his weaknesses. He could see Christ in her. He could see it was not he who did favor for his daughter but his daughter was the one who was doing favor for him. Indeed God demonstrated his own love for him in this way: Christ sent his daughter to bear his weakness. His daughter loved him so much that she bored his weakness to the point of becoming sick. When he remembered all his daughter did for him he could restore his first love for his daughter.

When we do not remember what the Lord has done for us, we can forsake our first love. It happened to me as well. I still remember when I stood at my wedding ceremony. I stood as the terrible sinner before God. But my heavenly Father treated me as his precious son. And the visible evidence of his love and forgiveness of all my sin was Maria who became my wife. I was so thankful for the love of my Father in heaven. And I was so thankful for Maria because she became my wife although she was a daughter of God. However, in the course of living together I blamed her so many times, and many times I was angry at her. Probably about 15 years later one day God opened my eyes, and showed me in a flashing moment what I had done to my wife in anger. At that moment I realized that my Father had been healing me. Because he healed me, at that moment, I was able to see what I had been doing to my wife. Why did I miss all of such thanks and love in my practical life for such a long time? Why did I have to miss it for such a long time? Why should I prove that I am such a terrible sinner in this way? When I think about it, we don’t need to.

We don’t need to become such terrible sinners who do not remember what God has done for us, what our parents have done for us, what our bible teachers have done for us, what our brothers and sisters have done for us, what our husbands or wives have done for us, and what our children have done for us. We don’t need to become such terrible people who do not remember others’ kindness and complain. Again we don’t need to become terrible sinners who forget all the good things our heavenly Father did for us and all the good things our neighbors did for us and complain. We can become thankful people remembering all the good things others have done for us. And we can be the people of great love for our heavenly Father and our brothers and sisters. We can love God with all our hearts, mind, strength, and will, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Can we do it? Yes. We can.

Thirdly, we can restore our first love for Christ by serving others with Christ’s love. Jesus said, ‘If you love me, you will obey my commands.’ And Jesus asked us to serve others in his love. By serving others with Jesus’ love, we can restore our first love for Christ.

One bible teacher had one earnest desire in his heart. It was to return the love of God to at least one person before he died. Then he served one bible student for 4 years through the bible study. After 4 years his student told him, “You served me for the last 4 years with bible study. Now I can see you truly love me” When the bible teacher heard the testimony of his bible student he knew God answered his prayer.

‘To spend time with Christ, remembering what God has done for them, and to serve others with Jesus’ love are probably what the church in Ephesus did not do anymore although they had done at first.

Jesus said, “Repent and do the things you did at first.” Jesus’ command was not ‘just think about it.’ But he said, ‘do the things you did at first.” Indeed the forsaking of their first love shows its evidence in the form of their deed. They did not do the things they had done at first.

What if the Ephesian church members do not repent? Jesus said in verse 5b. “**If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”** “To remove their lampstand from its place’ probably means they will be removed from the presence of Christ, and they will be removed from the love and care of Jesus. Or it could mean the church will disappear.

Look at verse 6.

**“But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”**

When I read the verse a question arose in my heart. This is one of their good deeds. Why didn’t the Lord said it right after he described their good deeds in verses 2 and 3 but in verse 6? Then I realized that ‘the practices of Nicolaitans’ could be related to the abandoning their first love, and that is why it is mentioned here. We don’t know exactly what is ‘the practices of Nicolaitans’. ‘The practices of Nicolaitans’ could refer to licentiousness. Although the church in Ephesus forsook their first love they did not abuse ‘the love of God’ as license to sin. There are many people who abuse the love of God as a license to indulge in sinful desires. But the church in Ephesus did not do so.

Now look at verse 7.

**“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”**

We all have ears but it does not mean we hear. To hear from our heart requires emptying our hearts. It is hard to hear because we think we are right. So we can make mistakes by asking others to repent when we need to repent. To hear what the Spirits says requires self-denial and spiritual discipline. What good is it for us to argue continually that we are right? If we hear what the Spirit says to the churches we can grow although we may be humbled.

If we truly hear what the Spirit says to the church in Ephesus, we will be victorious. If we are victorious Jesus will reward us, that is to have the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. Jesus will give us the same blessing given to Adam.

In conclusion, we learned today how we can restore our first love for Christ. We can do so by spending time with him, and remembering all he has done for us, and serving others with his love.

One word: Repent and do the things you did at first.