

YOU LOST THAT LOVIN' FEELIN'
Revelation 2:1-7

(Read Revelation 2:1-7)

Intro: You know my love story. Its long and involved, so let me give a Readers Digest version to quickly make a point.

I fell in love with Kathy in the summer of 1977 but she didn't fall in love with me until the summer of 1978. Once she came to her senses and knew what she was missing, I lost no time in making sure I got to see her as often as possible. But I lived 2,100 miles away in Albuquerque, New Mexico and she was in Pequea, Pennsylvania Well, (remember this is VERY abbreviated) when I determined I couldn't do that anymore I pointed my VW Bug east and drove straight through to get to her. At today's speed limits Maps says it's 27 hours – back in those days, the national limit was 55 and while I pressed that limit to the limit, it still took me almost 35 hours. The things we do for love!

Once I lived in the east, I was still about 60 miles away and I went to see her EVERY chance I got. Ice storms didn't stop me – I just got out of the old bug and chipped the ice away. Blizzards didn't stop me – the turnpike traffic is much lighter when you're the only one crazy enough to be driving. OH THE POWER OF FIRST LOVE!

Would I do that for her now 46 years later? After all, I still love her. In fact I love her better than that young wild-eyed love back then. But I think I'd be a bit more circumspect when the ice is an inch thick on my windshield.

There is something powerful about first love. And it's true for Christ Followers. The Apostle John is directing his first letter to Ephesus and his message from Jesus for them is You've lost that lovin' feeling.

Let's look at it. First a little info about Ephesus:

Ephesus was a hugely important commercial and cultural center. It was an important port and three major Roman roads terminated in the city. It was a religious center too with its temple of the Greek goddess Artemis (the same as the Roman goddess, Diana) which was known as one of the wonders of the ancient world. Saint Paul had ministered there for three years after the church there had been founded by Pricilla and her husband, Aquila, and their protégé, Apollos. This is all to say it was an important Christian center as well and they are the first Church to receive a letter.

This letter and the following six follow the same outline. First, there is an introduction which in six out of the seven letters gives a praise for what they are doing well. Second comes a description of the condition of the church there and, in the case of Ephesus, a warning about what needs to be addressed. The third is a promise to the overcomer who heeds the words of the Spirit and makes the necessary changes.

Right away we see that . . .

The Church at Ephesus was doing a lot and doing it very well

- They are commended for their hard word for the Gospel and for their patient endurance (v. 2). Robert Mounce writes, "*The Ephesians had toiled to the point of exhaustion and born patiently the hostility of a society at odds with their goals and efforts.*" Hmmmm – the hostility of a society at odds with them . . . sounds familiar.
- It was in Ephesus that Paul was thrown the wild beasts – so there was history here. And it's not surprising. As I pointed out a bit ago, Ephesus was a religious center and the false religions and cults put up stiff resistance to the truth of the Gospel. Some of those cults had made their way into the church. One of them is the mysterious group the Nicolaitans which we will look at later. Others were, no doubt, Gnostic groups which we've heard about before, who taught that special knowledge was necessary and the special knowledge they taught was totally contrary to the way of the Christ Follower. The Ephesian Christians get kudos for their alertness to false teachers who tried to infiltrate their believing community and spread false doctrine. Jesus calls them what they are, evil. They might call themselves apostles, but if they were, they were false apostles. Jesus taught, by their fruit you will know them. Look at their fruit. If something sounds off about their teaching, it probably is. Stay away from it.
- Jesus commends the Ephesians for their endurance and their diligence defending the faith. They were paragons of holiness. Charles Spurgeon had this praise for the Ephesians: "They showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays,

if a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some.” This is still accurate. It seems people will fall for anything and it’s frustrating.

- BUT . . .

They had lost that lovin’ feelin’

- One commentator says it this way: “You have lost your early love.”
- All the holiness and steadfast orthodoxy of the church in Ephesus was wonderful but it wasn’t enough without love. Julian Love (once again, his name is so appropriate for this subject), writes, “This church is condemned for having abandoned its love that it had at first.” And then he gives them a break and suggests, “Perhaps the two to go together. It is hard to keep the eye wary for all forms of evil, however necessary that may be, and keep love and full glow at the same time.” But we must love or all that holiness is just empty.
- F. B. Meyer says, “We may go far in outward activity for the cause of the redeemer and yet be threatened with removal of our candlestick. We may be full of labor, opposed to wicked men and false teachers, persistently orthodox, not fainting in the day of trial; and yet, if love be wanting, nothing can compensate.” And then he asks what we need to ask ourselves, “Is the complaint true of us? Have we lost our first love?”
- The issue is this, the failure of the Ephesians is perhaps the perversion of what they did best; opposition to false teachers led to censoriousness and divisiveness in the church, which meant they forgot about their first love, their love for others and, even, their love for God.
- A long quote from Robert Mounce addresses this and you need to hear it all: “Every virtue carries within itself, the seeds of its own destruction. It seems probable that desire for sound teaching and the resulting forthright action taken to exclude all imposters had created a climate of suspicion in which love within the believing community could no longer exist.

Unfortunately, the history of the Christian Church has all too many instances of unholy zeal in the pursuit of truth. Good works and pure doctrine are not adequate substitutes for that rich relationship of mutual love shared by those who have experienced for the first time the redemptive love of God.

A cooling of personal love for God inevitably results in the loss of harmonious relationships within the body of believers. Jesus had made it clear that *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” John 13:35.

Love for other believers was the distinctive badge of Christian discipleship, but at Ephesus hatred of heresy and extensive involvement in works appropriate to faith had allowed the fresh glow of love for God and one another to fade.” (End Quote)

- Morris Ashcraft says it this way, “They are reprimanded for the fact that they've lost their first love. They've abandoned it. There's no real indication as to why they had done this, but no amount of diligence, perception, or patience can fill the void when love has gone from a church. Never to have known love would have been depravity, but to have known love and to have abandon it is apostasy.”
- I’ve spent a lot of time on this and quoted people extensively because it is a danger we face in our church today. Let’s not EVER forget our first love! Let’s keep on loving each other and our neighbors and our enemies and being Jesus to them.
- Jesus admonishes the Ephesians and then he has one more “atta boy!”

Watch out for the Nicolaitans

- He says it this way, *Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* Revelation 2:6. Yes, losing your first love can lose a lampstand, but at least you still hate the works of the Nicolaitans. Notice, right after they are told to remember their first love, they are not told to hate the Nicolaitans. Christ followers can never be accused of hate. They hate the works, not the ones working those works.
- So, who are these Nicolaitans? It is not at all certain. One source says the Nicolaitans were the followers of Nicholas, one of the first deacons from Acts 6:5 and that is where they get their name. I’m not sure where this comes from other than the similarity of the name. It also seems they were committing the same sin as the Balaamites we read about in the letter to Pergamum, and they were guilty of sexual sin. Barclay writes, “The Nicolaitans, like all deceivers that come from the body of Christ, claimed “not that they were destroying Christianity, but that they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it.”” In other

words, beware of people selling new and improved or updated Christianity. What we have here in the Bible is what we follow.

- The truth is there is really no other description of who these people are, and anything we can say is conjecture. Here is my point, they were going in exactly the wrong direction, and the church is commended for not following after it. Jesus hated their works and the Ephesians hated their works. That's what we need to know.
- Finally, when we stand for truth and holiness, and stand against false teaching and all the while we remember that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:37). Then . . .

In Christ, Paradise is restored

- Let me read it again: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.* Revelation 2:7. If you have ears then listen to this message! We get back to the Garden! David Guzik writes, "In the midst of the Paradise of God: Originally, the word Paradise meant "a garden of delight." Eventually, it came to mean "the place where God lives." Where God is, that is Paradise!"

Conclusion: I need to wrap this up. In this letter the promise is a challenge to conquer and the one who conquers does not prevail over other people, but over evil through faithfulness to Jesus. And then there's the promise of the tree of life. The victors are permitted back into paradise. Ashcraft says this, "The overcomers in Revelation are not those who have conquered an earthly foe by force, but those who have remained faithful to Christ to the very end. The victory they achieve is analogous to the victory of Christ on the Cross."

The other morning our monthly Ashland County Ministerium Meeting was at the Ashland Mayor's office and he brought greetings. One of the things he told us was that the culture he is striving for in city government is one of kindness and respect, no matter how they are being treated. This comes from a heart that is filled with the love of Christ and I'm glad for his Matt's godly leadership. I think that cultural shift is showing in our city. I know it shows at ABC and I say KEEP IT UP!

When Mayor Miller sat down I showed him a video that came to my mind as he spoke. It's a song written by Lori McKenna and performed by Tim McGraw entitled Humble and Kind. The final words to that song will be my final words here and they are sure way to never lose that lovin' feelin'

I'll send you a link for the song when I get a chance.

"Don't take for granted the love this life gives you

When you get where you're going

Don't forget to turn back around

And help the next one in line

Always stay humble and kind." Amen.