

First Love
Revelation 1 and 2
By Iverna Tompkins
As transcribed by Jane Vaughn

As I was prayerfully seeking God for a message to bring to this particular meeting of Pastors and church leaders, I had a number of thoughts race through my mind, but I had to know: “God, what would You have me say to them?”

We could talk about *transition* – but we’ve been talking about transition for how long now? “The Body of Christ is *in transition*, moving from one season to another.” Or we have heard: “I personally am *in transition* right now. It’s such a hard place to be – sort of not knowing...” You know what they’re talking about: “birthing.” That’s the difficult and painful time before the emergence of something wonderful and new – we hope. ☺ And it really is a hard place to be.

We also have been talking about Jesus’ return – since I was a little girl. I was just certain the Lord was going to come back then! I’m still voting “Yes!” by the way. ☺ “Come Lord Jesus!” Sometimes I think we want Him to return just so we can get out of our messes! ☺

Then, speakers have been promising so many different things as we go to all the conferences and meetings. I like to go to hear those that promise what I want. ☺ And the truth is, there are many people who are doing just that – making promises the people want to hear! I like to listen to ministers who are saying: “There’s coming a great Revival! It’s on the horizon! We are going to be successful! (“this time,” is implied!) And all the promises God made to us are going to be fulfilled!” Those are my kind of ministers! ☺ I love to hear all that!

The other day, however, I found myself being really *honest with God*. Do you ever have those moments? ☺ I was reading that passage of Scripture which I know better than to read! ☺ It says, “*If you run with the footmen and he has wearied thee, what will you do in the day of the Jordan and its rising?*” (Jer.12:5). What will you do? Now, Jordan – has to do with “judgment.” Jors– is “spread out” and Dan is “judge.” So, we can understand this: “What are you going to do in the day of *spread out judgment?*”

I read it again and declared, “Lord, You said, ‘If you run with the footman and he has wearied thee...’” Well, I have – and he *has*! ☺ And I detect by your little chuckle that you are with me in that. ☺ But I think it’s really true. I think we are weary. We’re doing well... ☺ (cf. Gal.6:9) – but I know there is a weariness that has set in, especially on leaders in the Body of Christ.

I have good news and bad news for you. ☺ Which do you want first? The bad? Okay – the bad news is – it isn’t going to let up. ☺ The good news is – neither is the Lord! Hallelujah! He has no intention of letting up on our behalf! That which is pure and holy and bright is going to be purer and holier and brighter still, because the separation is taking place. (And some of us say, “Finally!” ☺)

Many of the younger ones in Church history have grown up during “gray” days. That’s when what was considered sin depended on what church (or denomination) you attended. That’s a sad comment! But I’m here to tell you now that the Lord has changed that situation into a *new season*. It will be a ***season of clarification***. You won’t have to look to someone else and say, “Is this wrong...?” “Pastor, is it wrong to do this?” “Is it wrong, Counselor, to do that?” You won’t have to do that any more! We are going to know! It’s going to be absolutely clear. **God is sharply defining according to His standard.**

When I was meditating with the Lord about this message, I felt He laid out something so familiar to you. I strongly doubt that most speakers, Pastors, or traveling Ministers, haven’t spoken from Revelation 1 and 2. I’m relatively certain you have studied this for yourselves, but that is our text for today.

Let's read Revelation 1:9-17 for our foundation: *"I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*

And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded about the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and his hair were while like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were like a flame of fire; And his feet like fine bronze, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice like the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last;'"

All of God's children are described as *lights* in the world – holding high a light for the world to see. We need to know that or we won't understand The Book of Revelation at all. Every one of us is a light. Each one of us makes up the lights (lampstands) that are spoken of here. It takes each one of us coming together to make up the whole of the group.

Read on – 2:1 – *"These things saith he who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear them who are evil, and you have tried (or, tested) those who say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; And you have borne, and have had patience for my name's sake and have not fainted – become weary. Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from which you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else..."* ☺

"Or else." That's what it says. ☺ We ramble on and ignore that little phrase, but that is what it says: "Or else." This is one of God's "or elses" (Pastors, that's a good sermon title.).

Continue in verse 5. *"...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."*

We have to understand (or comprehend) some important things in order to look at this Book with any great appreciation. The first thing we have to recognize is that we are in it. We're here in the Book of Revelation. What we miss so often is that this Book *was* – and *is* – and *is to come*. But He gives the whole key when He says, *"I am the First and I am..."* – and the indication is that He is also everything in the middle – *"and I am the Last"* (1:17).

So often we see this Book as an opening or a revealing of future events – and then we have to have charts! ☺ The dispensationalists go left – and the un-dispensationalists go right – and the people end up voting with dice! ☺ You know, each "side" can support its position, and the people are left with questions: "What do you think? What does this all mean?" "I don't know – just roll the dice and pick one!" ☺

We really do not come away from reading the Book of Revelation with much clarity of thought. That is because we are endeavoring to glean from this wonderful Book, that truly does finalize so many things, but our intention is to glean what is not going to be revealed by God – until its season! I know. We like our nice neat little packages of understanding all tied up with a pretty bow! But there are just some things we are not to know – yet. There are certain times of revelations and God has not shown us everything yet. But sometimes we try to force it and that accomplishes nothing.

When my father, a long time pastor and church planter, was in his dying days, he lamented to me, “I feel so badly that I didn’t *see* the things you and your brothers are preaching.” My reply to him was: “Dad, they weren’t revealed in your day.” Now that’s true again – there are some things being revealed today that weren’t revealed when I was younger. Thank God He goes on unfolding – unveiling – showing us some things we’ve not seen before.

So, when I looked at this concept and the context, I wondered: “Well, if we’re here in this Scripture, **how do we fit?**” My first thought was: **we’re the light**. Jesus said, “*You’re the light of the world*” (Mt.5:14). “*Ye are*” – there’s no question about it. There’s no: “I wish you would be.” Or, “You’d shine brighter – if you weren’t this or that.” There’s no conditional qualifying – it’s just: “*Ye are the light of the world.*”

When He opens the Book of Revelation to us, He says, “I want you to know that the pastors are going to be spoken to now.” In my little mind, I wonder... I always seem to take a path to understanding that isn’t as clear, maybe, as others – but I do wonder how John felt. John has been banished to the Isle of Patmos – for preaching the Gospel. He is out there alone... Listen – John is the number one worshipper in the New Testament (according to me which makes it true ☺). He is just – read his Gospel – his letters. He is such a lover! He just worships the Lord with all his heart and soul, mind and strength (cf.Mk.12:30). Look, he’s out there on a Sea Island and still he’s worshipping God. He says, “*It was the Sabbath and I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day* (Rev.1:10).

You see, when we’re in those places, “in the Spirit,” we *feel* spiritual. Tell the truth! I love to be in those places – those places of worship where all the people around me become dim. It’s like the old chorus: “And the things of earth shall grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.” I’m sure you’ve been there – some of you – in your quiet times with the Lord. And it’s just... oh, so wonderful! I want never to come back down!

But the Lord interrupts John on that day. “John, I have a message.” I can just imagine his reply: “Later, Lord! I’m worshipping...” ☺ Have you ever missed a great moment with the Lord – by asking Him to come later? ☺ Right “now” you’re just so busy – doing His work! ☺

And today, we are so **weary** of the world being against us. “Oh, don’t you just wonder? We can hardly just speak truth anymore – you get into such trouble when you do.” In trouble? With whom? “Well, they’ll snatch your – tax rights.” Aren’t you teaching your people that that is not the right motivation for giving? If that thing was snatched – your 501c3 – if your giving people couldn’t get tax credit – governmental tax credit for tithing – would they still tithe? If they wouldn’t, it’s because you have not taught them that the *blessing of tithing is so much more* than whatever they get off their taxes!

I still hear people say, “I can’t afford to tithe.” You know, Pastor, the honest answer to that is: “You cannot afford not to tithe!” Well, that’s a fairly standard response. But we simply haven’t taught the blessings of going *beyond tithing*. And the reason we haven’t, as pastors, is simply because: if everyone would tithe, those who attend our church and call us “pastor,” there would be no lack – at all. The tithe would be sufficient!

The truth is, God has set this whole thing up. He is the Administrator of Administrators. He knew exactly how to meet the financial needs of every group who meets in His name. But it never stops there. The Word doesn’t just say, “Make tithers.” It says: “*Make disciples!*” (Mt.28:19).

So then we go a step further and teach “Giving.” Now we have become very clever – and of necessity, I might add – but we’ve become very clever at how to motivate people to give. I’ve been – listen, you know my age (77) – I’ve been to churches where they promised all kinds of crazy little things – little gifts – if the people would just give. Like, “Put your name on a brick”? ☺ Come on! ☺

But, I believe the pressure that is going to come from the world is going to come very quickly now. And further, I believe it's going to be the best thing that ever happened to the church. Pressure. Think about it. If you've read the Book of Acts, they really weren't much of a *church* till they started getting shot at. ☺ Serious persecution.

If you look around this room, you're thinking – each one of you could be – thinking of 10 pastors that ought to be here! So, why aren't they here? You see, we just don't feel *the need* for one another. We've got it pretty good in this country. No pressure really. No real persecution.

Jesus says, “*I'm going to come for a Church without spot or wrinkle*” (Eph.5:27). How do you think He's going to iron us out? ☺ We're kind of a mess as we are, trying to come together in unity. I suggest He's going to press our little warm bodies together! ☺ Truth is: you've got a little trouble – and I've got some trouble – so, let's tell each other! ☺ Let's encourage each other! Let's pray together about our circumstances – about our city! We need to recognize the need for one another – but that hasn't happened yet. Not really. Not here!

There are lots of “*suddenlies*” in the Bible. And we see them in the Book of Revelation when God says: “I will come *suddenly* and do this” or “at once” or “these things will happen *soon!*” But God's “soon...”? ☺ “*A thousand years is as a day!*” (2Pet.3:8) ☺ So, when I come back to Him and say, “You said through the Prophet that *soon* You were going to do this!” He says, “I am!” And I have replied to that: “‘Soon’ is over! It was “soon” when he said it! ☺

We've all had that feeling and as time goes on without seeing the fulfillment, we then lose our faith in the Word, or in the Promise. And we seem desperate: “Well, I tell you I've tried to hang on to that. I've just done everything I could to hang on to that promise.” Wait. Hold on. What does *that* mean? Just what does that mean: “I'm going to hang on to a promise”? Are you out on a limb somewhere? ☺ (Sometimes we feel like we are! ☺)

But that's a trite colloquialism we think means something. It doesn't mean anything! If God has promised something – it is going to happen! If the fulfillment has a condition attached to the promise and you haven't done that – then don't claim the promise! You have no right of expectation for the fulfillment if you haven't done your part! It's like putting a letter in the mailbox with no address – just isn't going to get there!

So, the Lord says, “*If you will, I will.*” But if you *don't will* – He ain't gonna! ☺ So maybe we need to look back through a few things and see what it is we haven't done – satisfy that condition – and *then* “claim the promise,” as we say.

Here we are, then, the lights of Revelation 1 and 2 – and we are the Church (or “churches”). Seven is the perfect number. Simply, it carries the meaning: “completed” or “there's no more needed” or “it's fulfilled.” It means “perfection” – but not flawlessness. That's the number 7 as used in Scripture. Like so many of the other numbers it has various applications for its meaning. Here, seven churches. Seven specific churches that were geographically there in existence – over which John maintained apostleship. Smile, because John is presently sitting out there alone on an Island. That's for you who have a problem with the Apostle: “Well, they're not doing for us everything they *should* do.” Rejoice! ☺

Seven literal churches, yes. But they're also seven representative churches – or I'll just tear the pages out of my Book. ☺ I'm not interested in them. Hello. I need to know what significance this Scripture holds for me – for us – today. Oh, you legalists – I can just see your shocked little faces: “You would tear a Book out of the Bible?” ☺ But you see the point of that is – there's just a lack of responding *personally* if I don't think the arrow is mine! Might as well not have the pages in the Bible if I'm not going to respond appropriately!

So, when I see these churches in Revelation, I like to see them as *representative of churches everywhere*. Not 1–2–3–4–5–6–7 churches – but *His Church* spoken to in seven different ways. Or, if you will, seven particular *seasons* of time in which these churches operate or exist. This particular one, the first addressed, Ephesus – if I gave it a title I would call it the Apostolic Church.

Today, we are just entering a time, an era, a season – whatever your doctrine says that’s what I mean ☺ – but I want you to relate to this. We have come into a fresh awareness of the Apostolic office. We couldn’t even spell the word ten years ago. ☺ Everything back then was Prophetic and before that it was Teacher. And before that it was Preacher. And before that it was Evangelist. That was the emphasis of those times. I can walk you through the history – from Pentecost through the Charismatic Move and on through whatever this is that’s unnamed for now ☺ – The Messy Move! ☺ But it will not remain a mess! He’s getting us ready – for His next move!

Now, at this particular time of awareness, why has the emphasis come on the Apostle? That’s easy – because of the mess! ☺ Everyone out there is doing their own thing – started their own everything – and mostly were unqualified to do it. They’ve started their own because of being afraid of and/or having been hurt by denominations. Their attitude has become: “I’ll never come under *that* flag.” Or “I’ll never come under *this* flag.” And that’s fine – but – is there a flag you’re under? ☺ Is there *someone* to whom you answer? Is there someone that has the prayer concern over your life? Is there anyone who is strong enough to direct you? Oh God forbid! – we don’t want anyone directing us! ☺

But this situation is going to change. I promise you, it is in the process. It takes twelve miles to turn a huge ship – are you with me? It takes twelve miles for them to get a complete turn around. And that takes some time – it doesn’t happen in an instant. God has spoken to the ship: “Turn.” I don’t know what mile we’re on; I leave that to the Prophets. But I can feel the turn. Don’t you?

Do you know why I feel it? Because I can’t walk *steady* like I used to do. It’s hard when you’re on shipboard and they start to turn. You just want to shout: “Straighten it up! Let’s go back to what we used to be! I could walk straight then. At least I knew what I believed!” ☺ “Everything was clearer” – as we say, “back then.” It was more definitive. It was absolutely crystal clear – because – there wasn’t anything! ☺ You’d just get the ticket – that’s the Blood of Jesus Christ. Get the ticket, get on the boat ☺ – dunk on the way in ☺ – that’s the Baptism ☺ – and now you’re headed for . . . the Kingdom of God – wherever it is! ☺ That’s how it used to be. An even keel.

Don’t you remember those good old days? (It was just yesterday! ☺) And everything was crystal clear and uncomplicated – and then? Every time God gets involved – He complicates things! ☺ He complicates life. He complicates homes. He complicates churches... because – He’s uncovering some things – which is *revelation* – and that often *feels* complicating to us.

We call the content of this Book “Epistles” (cf.2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14: “*Write...*”) but in fact, they’re really not so much a message from an absent person as they are a message directly from Heaven to His emissary, His spokesperson John, whom He has interrupted on the Sabbath – to go to the *pastors* with His message. Messages to those who are “in charge.” (“*the angel of the church in...*”) In charge of what? [I want to pause for you to think about that!] **In charge of making disciples!**

We don’t do that, Church – “*Make disciples!*” We just preach! We bring in the best that we know – we even bring in – Teachers – and we bring in Prophets. For the most part, today we have the 5-fold ministry working. Thank God for that! Not together, mind you, as they will one day, but they’re working! ☺ Well, hey! I have faith for a lot of things! ☺

We bring them in and we expect *them*, in their allotted time, to make disciples of our people. Think about that..... It’s impossible! All we traveling ministers can do is promise the merchandise – show it on the shelf – and hopefully, prove it from the Word and demonstrate it from our lives. But we will never make it happen! We cannot make disciples of your people! It’s the Pastors who do that. Do you understand?

And Pastors, you cannot relegate that task to anyone else! It's your job – “Go and make disciples” (Mt.28:19). It's an Apostolic call, but has relevance to the Pastor. You have them, day in and day out. You have them week in and week out. The Bible says, “*Know your flocks and herds*” (Pr.27:23). Look at them – are you preaching to a mass or a mess? (Good question! ☺)

So – when the Lord gets ready to *change* something, He comes on the scene with His scrutiny. (You need to have a silent “Amen” to that in your heart!) And He's described in Revelation chapter one as having *eyes like flames of fire* (1:14). Oh, doesn't that sound holy? You see, I could preach this from a completely different angle and have you shouting “hallelujahs!” ☺ “Oh! I tell you! Here He is – with *hair like wool*...(1:14)” (You do know that is the picture of the judgment that's about to come ... ☺) “...with eyes as flames of fire...”

But the truth is, God is looking at the churches in these passages. **He is looking**... Listen – just to have Him look with *those eyes* means He's going to burn away everything that's burnable. If it's straw? *::papist::* It's going up! Wood? Stubble? I hear you say, “Well, I know a lot of churches that are just like that – straw – wood – hay – stubble.” Okay – He's not lookin' there! ☺ They're praying for Him to come – but like Malachi did (chapter 3), I could say to them, “Do you really want Him? Are you sure?” ☺ “You're doing fine without Him. No changes commanded – demanded – even requested. Just do what...” You know what I'm saying. God will come with His judgment as well as His love and mercy.

“Well, we've been praying...” – “we” being believers all over the world. And I don't think I've ever known of a time when this nation has been praying more for Revival! I mean – really praying! In city after city after city, wherever you go, believers are meeting together – they're praying – beseeching God – *begging* God – “Oh, come Lord! Come to our city!” We've had prophetic words spoken over the metropolitan area of Phoenix – tremendous promises! – and I want them to come to pass! I claim them along with you! “Yes, Lord!” is my response to all that. “But, God, You have to look at us!”

“*Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth,*” Song of Solomon says (1:2). If you're going to be kissed – on the mouth – by the Mouth – you have to look at Him, face to face. We cannot turn our backs and still ask Him. He can't (won't) hear that way!

So, He's coming to scrutinize His Church. If you are right with God and you're a pastor, doing what you can with your people – then you will welcome divine scrutiny. “*All thy promises are thoroughly tested,*” the Scripture says, “*and thy servant loveth them.*” (Ps.119:140; 1Cor.1:20).

This divine scrutiny is not a fearful kind of thing, but it is something we need to teach our people to embrace. They need to know – **that He is in this place**. I love to be in a place where the Spirit of God is! It's very difficult for me to praise and worship – oh, forget worship – just even to praise – when He isn't there! What's the point?

I know when He is there – I can sense His Presence. And we have to claim the promise: “*Lord, You said where 2 or 3 are gathered in Your name, You're there in the midst of them*”(Mt.18:20).

God says, “John, I want you to go to the Pastors – and I want you particularly to go to the church at Ephesus...” (which is the only letter, or message, we're going to look at for now). “I want you to go to the church at Ephesus and tell them what I see about them that I do approve.” Oh, don't you want to hear that from God? I do! Yes, I surely do! He continues in Revelation 2:2, “*I see, Church, what you have done. I see your hard, hard work*” (The Message). That's what that word speaks of – *their works* – “your hard, hard work.”

Some of you have it better (easier) than others – in pastoring. You have moved into a place or position where someone else sowed and planted, and you just stepped into that prepared field. So, now you're just

watering and it's wonderfully comfortable. I bless you in that place. That's just great! I'd give a little warning to you, however. Don't grow. ☺ You won't know what to do with it. ☺

Others of you have struggled and been striving – trying to *make* a thing happen and you've done everything you know to do (and a lot of things you didn't know how to do ☺). But it's just not lifting off the ground – whether it's a ministry or a pastorate or even a traveling thing – it's just not... But the **Lord is here, now, trying to encourage you today!** Listen to Him: “*I'm looking at you.*” God is smiling His approval. “I'm looking at you and I see your hard, hard work. You're not just sitting down. You're not just reclining on the prayer lounge.” Selah. “But you're putting some legs to your prayers and some action to your hands. You're moving. I see that. I see,” He says, “*your refusal to quit*” (2:2 The Message).

Now you can call it anything you want. I just plainly think it's tenacity – sanctified tenacity. It's not just stubbornness, like: “I'm here and they're not going to be able to get me out!” ☺ But with – listen – with a call of God – that is genuine – there is a *divine tenacity* that hits our spirits. It doesn't matter what the “votes” are from then on. We just are this – whatever His call is – and we're sticking to our conviction. I didn't call myself to the ministry – trust me! ☺ Nor would I again! ☺ But I will die in it. ☺ Because “*woe is me*” if not (1Cor.9:16). Can you understand that? Not everyone can grasp that kind of tenacious spirit. But you know how it can be sometimes. They (others) think they have a voice in the call: “We voted on them (out!) and they won't go. We've even withheld our tithe and they still won't go.”

But the Lord says, “*I'm looking at you!* I see you. It doesn't matter what is happening right now. I'm here and I'm burning away – with My *look* – everything burnable. You're going to come forth with a burnt, bronzed body – like your Lord!” (Rev.1:15) ☺ He says, “I see that you can't...” Let's read this from The Message – only he would dare to use this vocabulary! “*I know you can't stomach evil!*” God says, “I see that! That's good!”

Now Church, each one of these points would be a sermon in itself if it was handled properly, and you know that. But we have stomached evil. To our shame. We have become so accustomed to it because we have lived with it for so long. You get in a group outside of your church circles and very often you can't tell who the believers are – and who are not. And I'm not talking about tracts hanging out of your pocket. I'm talking about your life – our lives – being of such obvious *countenance* that people ask us why or how? Peter wrote it this way: “*Sanctify the Lord God in your heart and be ready always to give an answer to everyone that asketh you a reason of the hope!*” (1Pet.3:15).

Dear Lord, if our faces (our countenance) are the message of hope! Help us! What can be read in our faces? Or deciphered through tone of voice or other postures or facial expressions? Tell me you haven't seen “rolled eyes” accompany statements like this: “Did you hear the latest about our President?” ☺ Grimaces and smirks and *eyes* communicate so much more than our words alone. We're to have hope and be able to give people the “*reason of our HOPE!*”

Here's the truth now: the word that says “*Be glad in the Lord*” – that word means “lighten up and brighten your face.” (Hebrew /sameach/ – as found in: Ps.21:6; 32:11; 40:16; 67:4) “But,” I can hear you say, “That's hypocrisy! If I don't feel like it, I'm not going to pretend it!” The Book says, “Pretend it!” ☺ Brighten up! Because pretty soon, you will feel it – your feelings will catch up with your mouth! When you encounter someone who is deeply gloomy and you merely inquire: “How are you?” you may wish you had not asked – because they want to tell you. ☺ But, that's our opportunity! We need to seize the moment! That's the opening we need to look for – that's when we can minister God's Truth to the situation.

And the Lord says, “I see that – and you weed out the apostolic preachers, too.”

Now, please keep the balance of this. I think you will because I've already spoken positively for the need for some guidance, or direction. But there are an awful lot of so-called “Apostles” who are known by

their “white belts” – or shoes! – or – calling cards, should you doubt. ☺ “I – am – Apostle ... whatever” And the word to the leader of the church (ours and “at Ephesus”) is this: “I see that you check that out! You test it – and find out those that are not – and don’t tolerate that charade!” I think that’s so keen – that God likes that! Checking things out with Him (and others) before we bite. He doesn’t want us taking any wrong “bait” – hook – line – and sinker!

What He’s really saying is this: “Don’t be political.” If you’re going to be in politics, go be in Politics! Be a believer in Politics! That’s good! But if you’re going to be in the Pulpit, don’t try to do both. I’ve seen many good men fail in that endeavor. And “politics” in the Church do not advance the concerns of God, only the aspirations of some people!

So, what He’s saying here is: “***I’m looking at you.*** I’m watching you. I see you’re doing what I called you to do – and you don’t wear out, or give up. *I see that you hate this Nicolaitan business* (2:6 - The Message) – these people who come in with the message that you must accept everything – even if it’s food offered to idols.” Or they rationalize: “Okay... so there’s a little sexual impurity here...” (It’s always “a little” when it’s in our church.) We hear it mumbled: “Okay, so maybe they’re sleeping around...” But God knows. Do you, Pastor? “Well, I try – I just try not to get involved because I don’t want to run them out of the church...” (and besides, they’re the biggest tithers!). ☺ Well then, we need to send them to the Christian Counseling Center – let the professionals deal with them objectively. But we need to deal with the sin, not hide it or ignore it! It needs to be addressed. It is s-i-n! You cannot just let it go unchallenged – because the eyes of the Master see – they are “*flames of fire*” – and they burn now.

May I interject a little something here? It would be very wise to use Counselors you trust and not try to do that kind of counseling yourself, because even if you’re instrumental in straightening them out with God – every time they come to your church and look at your face, they’ll remember that you know. That’s just you free part today, but the voice of one who knows by experience.

God declares some things. He says, “I see all this (sin) and if you don’t do something about it, I am going to remove your church from its place” (2:5). Now that’s strong talk! But it is, in essence, what this Scripture means. “I’m going to move you out...” One translation says, “I’m going to remove you (or it) from the circle of light.” There’ll be no more *revelation*. The version I prefer says, “I’m going to remove it from its place.”

You see, you are placed. You’re *divinely placed* – right where you are – now – today. Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with a brother and sister who minister on the streets in Los Angeles – in some of the “worst” areas. I loved talking with them because they’re doing so many things. And the things they’re doing, some of the rest of us wouldn’t be caught dead doing! Oh, I am serious! You probably would be caught dead if you tried doing those things! ☺ But they’re meeting people at their level and ministering to the people where they are – on the streets.

We need to learn our place. One of the big failures is when we try to be everyone. “He seems to be doing really well, succeeding – I’ll try that too...” Or, “Perhaps I’ll try what he’s doing...” Or, “Maybe I’ll try that...” “Oh, I’ll try...” The Lord says, “I’m going to take your illumination away if you try to be someone else! You keep your place and train your people to be like Me,” says our Lord to His Apostle to His pastors. You see the trickle-down economics there? (sounds like Ronald Reagan ☺ – he was a good man! ☺)

We could get into who the /angelos/ was – the “angel” in these verses. Very honestly, it’s quite appropriate to say this is the Pastor of the church. The Lord says to him, “If you don’t do something about this – what I’m about to tell you – your whole church (ministry) is totally *disapproved* – and My disapproval will *remove your church* from its intended place.” That doesn’t mean you can’t preach – you can always find a place to preach. It means that **if you know you’re called of God and He has placed you where you are, you need to protect that place.** Does that make sense to you?

And if we don't heed the warning – now this is the main part of the message, although it's the shorter part – if we don't protect the place, God says, “*The things that I disapprove...*” – out of all these wonderful things He has said about them – He also says, “...*there is one thing, however, I have against you, and that is that you've lost your first love*” (2:4).

When I first looked at the passage, I thought, “Oh God, You know these are preachers and every one of them has preached on this Scripture: “Lost your first love – we need to go back and love Him like we used to love Him.” And then in the past our response was a little perfunctory: “Lord, I love You! I do love You!”

But have you ever tried to love someone you don't really love? That's a very difficult thing to do! Just sit on a platform in someone else's church (never your own! ☺) and watch the people who don't honestly love God first – watch them try to worship Him. **If you don't really love Him**, you can't sustain worship for two minutes!

True story: I was in a church recently where the leader said, “Let's give one minute! Just one minute to praising the Lord!” I watched some people begin to speak praises God, but all the while glancing at their wrists! ☺ They tried: “I love You, Lord – I love You – I love You – Hummm – mmmm – mmmm I do, Lord!” Yet all the while watching their wrists! “I worship You – oh, lovely One! I praise Your holy Name.” Still gazing intently on the little personal clocks – counting the seconds! “Time! That's a minute!” ☺

Well, here's the question for us then: **How do you know if you've lost your first love or not?**

Our first love of God is revealed in our response to His Presence! What do you *do* – when you sense the Presence of the Lord during worship? I have to tell you this: too often the worst responders are preachers! I promise that's right! I know the truth of that tragic statement. If I had mostly non-preachers here, we would be praising the Lord over the good and repenting over the bad already! Because they just move into it! You know for certain where you are with them. But Preachers? It's simply body language: staid or stern facial expressions and arms crossed over the chest. *Hardened* body language! **That has to change!** You can't teach your congregation what you don't demonstrate!

But – not only have we lost our first love of *Him*, **we've lost our first love of – being in the ministry!** Remember when you were first called to serve God? Can you remember how thrilled you were? “Oh, I know I have a call from God! He placed me in the ministry!” “Oh, I can remember the anointing I had the first time I preached! Oh! The anointing was so incredible!” Do you remember that? Can you remember that excitement? It was so thrilling – that first time you helped someone – the first time you led someone to Christ. Can you remember those feelings? I mean, the whole of your being was, “Oh, God! Do anything You want with me! I **love** You!” And we freely released the Holy Spirit through us! We've lost that first love of being in the ministry.

[Editor's note: Although this message originally was delivered to a large group of Pastors, we all have a calling from the Lord and a *placement* – we may call it “Lay Ministry.” We still can appropriate these truths for ourselves, and adopt them to our specific situations. Just ask God to show you how this fits you. jv]

Paul never did! He never lost a sense of the thrill of ministry. “*I thank my Lord Jesus Christ that He has found me faithful and enabled me and put me in the ministry!*” (1Tim.1:12). He never got tired of that call. You get a bunch of preachers together today and you will hear us talk negative! “Well, I'll tell you – God called me, but, oh, my word! *:: whine :: cry ::*” I... I want you – challenge you – every time you hear your negatives from now on – I want you also to hear this: “***I'm looking!***” ☺

We also have lost our first love of God's people. We jokingly, but with some truth in the mixture, say, “I don't mind pastoring – it's the people that bug me.” ☺ Admit it, we've said that – or thought it –

loudly! We need to go back to the first love – when we were rightly challenged with that counselee that walked in the door – when we were appropriately challenged with *those* people that came to the church, looking different from our usual congregation. Different, as in smelly ☺ – tattoo-ish – spikey ☺ – I think I’ve made my point – and you get it! ☺

But too bad for you, Sweet Baby, there are seeds being sown out in *that* field. And those seeds are being watered too and when they sprout up, they’re going to show up in your pews! And they’re not going to look as changed (on the outside) – as they are (on the inside!). It’s going to take love to disciple them – not just to buy them a new outfit and pay for a haircut (neither of which do they want ☺). But it’s going to take God’s kind of love to disciple them – to want to change.

Then, we’ve lost our first love of the lost. I’m perfectly content these days (too content) to have other people going out into the streets of the cities, holding big rallies and ministering to the lost. Do you know what upsets me about that? (I started to say “makes me mad” and that would’ve been more honest! ☺) What upsets me is the reports that come back that you can go to a major city, hold an incredible street revival where thousands attend and hundreds accept Christ – but the local churches will not support the ministry or follow up with the new babes in Christ that are left in their midst! That ticks me off! It really, truly angers me! And if it bothers this little fat Mama, can you imagine what it does to our Lord Jesus Christ?

When He says, “*I’m looking!*” there has to come a change!

Finally, we’ve lost our first love of the nations. If it’s not happening here where we live, we don’t really care. It’s remote and far-removed from us. Out of sight, out of – heart!

“*Go ye into all...*” of Phoenix. ☺ That’s not what He said. “*Go ye into all...*” – of even California! That’s big. But that’s not what Jesus said. His command was to go to “*...all the world! Preach the Gospel. Tell them about Me and make disciples.*” (Mt.28:19).

First, you tell them about the Savior. Then tell them how to live like Him. How simple can it be? But there we are, flipping through the pages of our Bibles, getting ready to PREACH! “Oh, I’m trying to find a – a deep word for the people.” There! – you’ve already got it! This is deep: “First you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you learn to live like Him.” That’s it! That is it!

Then you can reign with Him – but who cares? ☺ Personally, I’ve had enough authority on earth. I’m not really keen on ruling and reigning in the future, but I’ll probably reign. Do you understand that? Some people are so excited to have positional authority where they can just “crack the whip!” – “Some day, I’ll come back with Jesus and I’m going to rule and reign over my enemies!” No, not you! ☺

So, **what is redeemable?** Stop and think about that before you read on... The answer is so simple: ***everything!*** Everything is redeemable! Let’s realize that **the Lord never unveils or reveals anything that He isn’t ready to redeem.** And such a tiny little part we play in it! *Repentance* (2:5). “*Do the first works.*” Bring your life into focus with the will of God. There is such power in that! And yet if you don’t (“*or else*”) – He’ll *remove* it – you’ll not have the key position you do now – you’ll not be where you ought to be – you’ll be on the outside – on the outer edges – you’ll have a cabin without windows.

The ship is going to turn and when it completes the turn, my friend – call it “Revival” or “Another Move of God” – or anything else you want as a label. You can’t do it by gathering multitudes – you can’t do it by command and demand and all the rest of that speaking in authority. But you can do it – or I can do it – by **obedience** in what He says to do. **Repent – or else!** If you do repent, it’s all redeemable.

I believe God wants to return to us our first love – of Him – of the call of God – of the work that we’re doing – of people that He is sending to us – of people He is not sending to us – being able to send others

to the nations of the world – and loving it, not resenting it! And not demanding from them something in return..... Hello?

I want us to shine brighter than we've ever shone before. I want us to be the illumination the world is crying for – and fighting against. Every day we need to let Him shine through us.

This hasn't been a RAH – RAH message, but it's been one that'll be good for you if you can apply it with appropriate truth. And I wonder if you would honestly say, "I've heard from God." You see, I don't really know what you need – but I know us and we all "need." Is it in your heart to agree with this prayer of confession? "Lord, I sense a need in my life for a return to from whence I've come – some place I've been and have lost."

[When Iverna asked that of the 80 or so pastors and leaders gathered for this luncheon in Phoenix, so many were moved to respond – all around the room – men and women – pastors and leaders. It was amazing! This is how she prayed:]

"Father, I'm asking, in Jesus' Name, for a return of the first love – our first love! ***A first love!*** I pray You'll bring us back to true love, because that will spark true worship. Oh, Lord, we don't need to know all the methods of worship. When we really love You, there are innumerable ways to show that love! When we really love the lost, there are innumerable ways to show our love for the lost.

So, I ask You, Lord, whatever the needs are in these lives, that *You* will meet those needs! We believe You, Lord, and we do ask You for a quick work. Lord, time is running short. You know it is true, and I ask that You'll not take Your eyes off of any individual here. I ask You not to take Your eyes off of our work, off of our calling, off of us personally. Lord, we need You to ***look at us!*** – and burn out what needs to go! In Jesus' Name!"