

02-07-28b Revelation

These stars are pictured in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ and that tells you something. What do you think is going to happen if the messenger stops giving the message? Do you need to go, I mean you can suggest, you know, you can approach, we should speak the truth to one another in love, right? Well that one another, it doesn't exclude the pastor. But you cannot pressure a man into doing something and not fall foul of the Lord's injunction here.

Because the stars, the messengers, are held in the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I promise you, if that pastor has the desire to please God, he's going to use that right hand and he's going to get that messenger where he needs to be. A messenger that is trying to do what pleases the Lord, just pray, talk to the one who holds him in his right hand.

If your messenger needs to have more content, if he needs to focus more on the word and not get distracted, pray for him. The Lord Jesus Christ will tighten up that right hand. He's got the star in his right hand.

This again reflects the chain of transmission here. I hesitate to use chain of authority, although I do, because we get the idea that whatever my pastor says, he's my authority, he's my spiritual authority. That's not what's being said here.

You can't say, well, I believe that and I did that because that's what my pastor said, and he was my authority, so I just did whatever he said. You cannot divest yourself in the same way that Lieutenant William Calley in the Vietnam War, when he went off and sprayed the My Lai people full of bullets, he was not able to, if the story as we received it from the press is true, and I don't really know what happened with Calley. It's believable, but I don't know if it's factual.

I don't know, maybe some people are young enough now, they don't remember the My Lai massacre, but the story was that Lieutenant Calley and his squad or platoon or whatever went into the village of My Lai and overreacted. There's not a village in Vietnam that probably didn't have ammunition stored in the walls and huts and things, but you don't line up all the women and children and just mow them down with a machine gun like the Nazis did in World War II. The story is that that's what Lieutenant William Calley did.

He says, well, I was under orders to go in and wipe out this village. I was under authority, I just did what my authority told me to do. The court-martial and all of the flack that resulted from this, regardless of the actual details, the principle which was upheld in that scenario was the fact that you got orders from somebody over you does not excuse you from your moral responsibility.

There is such a thing as an illegal order. There is such a thing as an order that is not right. You cannot excuse yourself and let yourself off the hook and say, well, I was just following orders.

Look at the Nuremberg trials. Hitler gave all of these things about the death camps. Well, did they

hold the people accountable that carried out those orders? Yes, they did, because they were morally wrong.

They were morally reprehensible, to put it mildly. You can't say, well, I was just a link in the chain. That was my authority, I just did what they said.

I was just a hapless victim. No, you're not. You have a conscience.

You have God the Holy Spirit. That's why in another place it says you have no need for any man to teach you, John says. Why? Because you're accountable to God.

You find a pastor, but you're accountable for what you take from that pastor and what you do with it. And you can't lay it off on him because you did or failed to do any given thing. He is a conduit, but you're still accountable before the Lord.

So there is a chain. This is my point. But don't let yourself off the hook and say, well, I'm just a link in the chain.

He holds the seven stars in his right hand. He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. What does that tell you? He's looking at those lampstands.

How well is that flame burning? How much light is that lampstand giving off? The evaluation of the Lord Jesus Christ is implied here. He walks among. He's not just standing there.

They're not like a little... You know how they do at a wedding where they light those big rows of candles? You look up there and they've got all of those slanted candles going up and they've got the unity candle in the middle and the people get married and they light the... You've got all of those candles and it's like a set piece. People just stand there and say, okay, wedding photographer, take your pictures. He's walking among the lampstands.

He's walking around. What's he doing? He's looking at them. Is this wick need trimming? How's this thing doing? If it quits giving light, I'll snuff it out and get some other lampstand.

Well, what are the lampstands? Those are the actual churches. So he's got the stars in his hand and he's got direct control over those, but he's also walking among the lampstands deciding, is this lampstand going to stay or is it going to go? Sometimes churches disappear. Local churches go away.

They just collapse of their own weight and can't sustain themselves and disappear. People bemoan the fact that, oh, this church has so many years disappeared. Church I used to pastor up in Oklahoma is gone.

Well, why did it go? You could probably account for a lot of reasons, but the Lord Jesus Christ will sustain a church if it's giving off its light and if it's not giving off light, it may disappear. There's a

lot of unlit churches that are still in existence, but he's probably not walking among them anymore. So what's the point? God is evaluating and judging and disciplining the pastor.

The Lord Jesus Christ is walking among the lampstands. He is looking and evaluating the church and by extension the people in the church. So don't think that just because the pastor has double discipline and all of that that there is not a scrutiny of the Lord Jesus Christ with those flaming eyes of fire that doesn't look at our fire as a church.

How are we doing corporately? How are we doing individually? There is a scrutiny. There is a presence as well, and the presence of Christ is both a comfort and a motivation to do well. Kids are always on their best behavior when the parents are right there watching.

Kids in the classroom always do better when the teacher is looking over their shoulder. You get very diligent, very studious when you're being watched. It's a reminder.

It should also be an encouragement. The Lord Jesus Christ is with us. He hasn't started up the churches and said, I've given you a pastor here and now I'm going to go up to heaven and sit at the right hand of the Father and do other things.

He's a presence. Two or three are gathered together in my name. There am I in the midst, Jesus says.

The Lord Jesus Christ is with us here. He is dwelling in the hearts of those who have His words and keep them. That ought to be a comfort.

The only people who have to worry about the near presence of their parents or the near presence of the teacher are those who are malfunctioning and guilty. Then they don't want to be. They wish their parents were not there.

They wish their teacher was not looking over their shoulder if they were doing something wrong. But when you're doing what you're supposed to, it's a comfort. It's an encouragement.

It can be a motivation to have them nearby. You can show that you're employing what you're learning. You're implementing the things that they've taught you.

The presence of a mentor, of a teacher, can be a very wonderful thing. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at verse 2. I know your works, your labor, your patience, that you cannot bear with those who are evil.

But if there's one thing we bring away from this first portion of our study, it is that the Lord Jesus Christ is present. He has made provision for us. He's provided a conduit for His Word, the nourishment for our souls to be provided.

And there is an accounting. There is a measuring. There is a scrutiny of us.

What are we doing with what we have been given? The Lord's gone to a lot of trouble to set up the lampstands and put the messengers in place. He's gone to a lot of trouble to convey His inspired Word. And He's sent forth the Holy Spirit to each one of us as a lifelong ministry.

What are we doing with that? Are we paying attention? Are we motivated? You remember the three areas of life that we talked about? Priorities, goals, and values? That's a very useful way to analyze how we're spending our time, if you think about that. Because many people have goals. You know, people have the goal to be a successful rock star.

Well, that says something about their values, doesn't it? They think a great standard of achievement is to be a great famous person where there are crowds. Patty and I were talking about this the other day. Did you ever notice how at the end of so many movies, there's a crowd of people applauding? The world thinks that the height of great achievement and of fulfillment and of gratification is to have a crowd of people clapping.

You know, at the end of a rescue movie or at the end of an adventure movie or whatever, the guy comes off or comes up out of the ground or whatever, and hears all the people applauding. Somebody's up on their shoulders. Just watch how many movies at the end, you've got a crowd of people applauding and clapping and cheering for someone who came through the denouement, the climax and everything of the movie.

And this is what the world thinks. It's applause, it's appreciation by the masses. Well, some people have that as their standard, their value, and that drives their goals.

And once you have a goal, it's going to influence your priorities. What do you prioritize? One of the sad things about Alzheimer's is people lose their ability to observe priorities. They can put something on the stove to boil and walk out of the room and totally forget it.

This poor lady a couple of weeks ago who left her child in the back of her SUV and went in to work and five hours in the hot sun and her child was dead. And you think, oh gee, how can that happen? Is it just absent-mindedness? I mean, she was hysterical when she came back out. But a part of that is priorities.

It's a matter of priorities. Did she have the goal to kill her child? No. Was that a part of her value system? No.

What was the problem in her thinking? It's priorities. Her mind was consumed that morning with her job. She was called in.

It was kind of an unusual day. She was thrown off her sequence a little bit. But if you're consumed by your work, if you dump your child off at daycare, and I'm not knocking daycare, but if you put your child there and don't give them another thought for five hours, you don't stop and visualize in your mind, I wonder what my little child is doing.

If you don't have a relationship with your daycare worker that says, gee, you didn't show up with your child this morning, let me just give a quick call and see where you are. Did something happen? I was expecting your child and they didn't show up. That's a part of your priorities.

How important are your children to you? And why do these tragic things happen? It isn't goals and it isn't values. It's priorities. It's a failure in the area of priority.

If you're a mother and you don't stop and think about your child every so often, how can you go five hours and not give a thought to your child? It's a priority issue. And it doesn't take but just a little difference of priorities to foul things up. Well, I've run way over here, so we'll stop and take our break.

But think about the Lord Jesus Christ walking amongst the lampstands. That ought to be the basis on which we establish our goals, our values, and our priorities. What is most important? What matters? How do I spend my time? And we're going to see that that is the problem that's being addressed here in the church at Ephesus.

And if I'll ever stop talking, we can have our break and we'll come back and see it. Let's resume our study now in Revelation 2. We're looking at the first letter, the letter to the church at Ephesus. To the messenger of the church of Ephesus write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

Hopefully that has meaning for us. We understand what is being communicated here about the responsibility that pastors have before the Lord as under shepherds. Why they are not only eligible for enhanced blessing, but also for enhanced discipline.

I could take you to those passages, but it doesn't pertain. It's something I have to worry about in the middle of the night. But he goes on to say, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.

If you think about the traditional model of being a Christian in America today, there is a lot of work being done, isn't there? And it's good work. There are a lot of programs. There's visitation.

There are meals being prepared. There are missionaries being sent. There are trips.

There are ministries that seek to help people that are in different sorts of trying circumstances. There are ministries to people whose marriages are in trouble. There are ministries to people who are homeless or underprivileged or lack clothing.

There was a thing I saw, I think in Tahlequah, didn't they have Luke's Closet, which was a place where you have sort of a goodwill that was operated specifically by believers for those who were less fortunate. They had a similar thing down at Dallas Seminary where if you are short on clothing, you could get clothing. There are wonderful ministries.

I know First Baptist Church downtown has a ministry specifically for people and families of people who have an illness, and they take it upon themselves to try to supply meals and try to ease people through very trying circumstances. These are wonderful things. There's nothing wrong with programs per se.

The difficulty happens, and it can happen to us in our own operations, where we begin to think that the things that we do are our spiritual life rather than a fruit of our spiritual life. It's the difference between the fruit itself and a healthy tree that produces that fruit, and the means by which that fruit is produced is so important because you can have five people all doing the exact same activity. You can have five people get together and go sing to somebody in the hospital or prepare a meal or minister to the needs of someone in some fashion, evangelism team, whatever, and you can have five different levels of spiritual production ranging from zero to a hundredfold depending on the why, on the thoughts and intents of the heart, the motivation, the to whom are you offering this work.

Are you doing it before the Lord because you want to please Him? Are you doing it before your fellow team members? Are you doing it because you want to see that gleam of gratitude in the eye of the person for whom you're doing it? Why do you do what you do? We are visually oriented, and we think that the tangible result is what counts, and it's not. It is the why, and sin works the same way. People were shocked when Jesus said, If you look at a woman to lust after her in your heart, you've already committed the sin, because it's what goes on in the heart that determines where we stand before God.

There is not enough attention paid, probably by any of us, but certainly not in a modern organized church. There is not enough attention paid to the why. People are so anxious that things be done, that money be given, that ministries be engaged in, that positions be staffed, and the tasks be accomplished.

We're task oriented. We're goal oriented. We want to see the visible results.

We want to measure it. We want to count heads. We want to measure dollars.

We just have to have concrete, tangible things. Well, we forget that this is a spiritual life. It has spiritual fruit.

It is a spiritually energized form of activity that winds up having tangible results. But it is so easy to get engaged in the work for its own sake or for whatever other reason. Jesus says, Look, I know your works.

I know what you're doing. I know all the things that you do. The word here for works is erga.

Erga. Ergonomics. It helps you do your work better.

When I was at Navy and I was on the crew, they had a machine that simulated an oar. A crew, an

eight-oared shell. You've got the guys in the long skinny boats and a coxswain, and you've got the four oars out each side and an eight-oared shell.

And you row. It's an art and a science. But a big part of it is you've got to have the endurance of a behemoth to be able to row all the way back.

And you have to be precise. Every stroke has to be perfect. If your form is not quite right, you're either going to slow down the boat or you're going to get flipped out.

Well, to practice, they have a couple of different things. They had a static boat that sat in the middle of a horseshoe track thing full of water, and the oar has a hole in it. And you basically, instead of rowing yourself along, you're static, and you move the water with your oar, and you practice your form.

You practice the catch, and you practice getting the feathering of your oar out of the water, and your form, and full stroke, and legs, and back, and arms, and the whole bit. Well, that's one thing. That's where you practice technique.

The other place where you just develop brute strength and where you measure your brute strength and endurance was a machine called the ergometer. And the ergometer was a big flywheel deal with a variable resistance and a sliding seat and a handle like an oar and a counter. And however many times this great, huge millstone wheel underneath the thing went around was measured by this.

So you would do what we call row and ergo. You would set a certain amount of time, and you'd see how many revolutions can I get, and it measured work. And so you'd get on there, and there were guys that could just spin that thing like you can't believe.

They had a lot of raw, horse-like strength in their muscles. I mean, they could just get there and keep going, and going, and going, and really endure, and you build that up, you know. And so however many revolutions you can get in a row of three-minute ergo or six-minute ergo or something like that, that would tell you how you're doing.

But that is not enough to just do the raw work. Rowing a great ergo would not necessarily get you into the first boat or even the second boat of the varsity crew because it's not enough. It's how you do that work.

It's the time you spend in the tank, rowing the tank, and developing your technique so that that raw power gets transmitted most efficiently into forward motion of the boat and that you're in harmony with the other seven oarsmen. And it's all about technique and about the artistry of employing that effort. The effort alone will not do it.

It has to be effort that is done in the right way. And in my mind at least, and maybe you have to

be there, but in my mind it always is a great illustration of the way we live our lives as believers because there are things that need to be done, and we can do them. We can exert the raw energy to do the ministry, to do the studying, to do the listening, to do the whatever it is that we're called to do.

But we have to remember that it is how we do what we do. It's why we do it. It's the thoughts and intents of the heart that God judges, that the Word of God illuminates for us.

And many times we have to have a change of mind. We're not changing the task. You can be right in the middle of folding a piece of laundry, and the first half of what you folded doesn't count, and the second half does.

Because in the midst of doing that, you did a little, what we call a gut check. You know, why am I doing what I'm doing? Do I deserve bitterness? Am I kind of crying the blues to myself here? Are my eyes on myself? Am I feeling hanged up? Am I feeling put upon? Why am I doing what I'm doing? Why am I doing what I am doing? And we have to check, because we can have an instantaneous shift by reminding ourselves of the Word of God, by checking in with God the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that we've had some sinful thought patterns, and right in the middle of doing something, we have suddenly started pushing out that spiritual fruit again, that stopped at the point that we let bitterness or some other form of self-centeredness and unhappiness creep in. We have to stop and do that.

So many believers are toiling, whacking away in the white field, and they're just whacking the stubble. The fields are white for harvest. You remember when we studied that parable, one of the most misunderstood parables in the whole Bible, one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible, is when Jesus pointed to the disciples and said, look, the fields are white for harvest.

Pray that God will send laborers into that field who know how to reap it. That field is not the field of un-evangelized souls. That field is spiritual value.

It's the glory of God. It is the harvest of grain that God wants to bring into His storehouse. It's the reason we're here, to produce that fruit.

And to take the normal, everyday activities of life and harvest those in a great harvest of righteousness, the field is white for harvest. We have everything we need. We have the Word of God.

We have the Holy Spirit. We know why we're here. We know what we're supposed to be doing.

It's just a matter of waking up and ensuring that we have the right attitude as we do what we do. Isn't it wonderful? You don't have to saddle up and go to the mission field. You don't have to run down and enroll in seminary.

You don't have to find a big church that's got an inter-urban ministry or a ministry to left-handed

single divorcees between 45 and 48. Your ministry, your field, is there. And it's already grown and ripe for harvest.

All you have to do is... I learned a song in the fourth grade. A lady named Mrs. Allen, who was also the Spanish teacher, taught us this song. Swing the shining sickle.

Cut the ripened grain. Gather in the gleaming everywhere. Now our day of gladness.

It's a Thanksgiving song. Thanksgiving Day is here. Swing the shining sickle.

Cut the ripened grain. That's what God wants us to do. The grain is standing in our field, ripe for harvest.

That's what Jesus is talking about here. I know your works. I know your labor.

And the word labor here is kopan. Kopan is kind of like the word... Remember we had amal, we had toil in Ecclesiastes. We had the difference between works, which was asad.

That's to make or to do. Asad, God asad the woman out of the rib of the man. Asad, to make or to do.

You manufacture something. You're in the midst of it. You're assembling parts.

You're making or you're doing something. Whatever you do, your works. Solomon said, look at all these works I did.

I planted this, that and the other. And then we had another Hebrew word that talked about labor. Where it is more the effort that's expended.

The energy that it takes to produce something. Works more focus... Asad and erga focus more on the end result. You've done something and here's the result.

You've made it. That's why it's used for manufacturing something. You do it, well look, now I've got a new thing here.

Well, so we have erga, which is works. I know the results that you've been able to obtain. And then we have kopan.

Kopan has the idea of toil. The effort that went into it. What it took out of you to produce this finished product.

I know your works. I know your labor. I know your patience.

And this is our old friend, hupomone. To bear up under. Your endurance.

You shouldered the load. I was out here working on this pool thing. It's one thing to be out there

raking and leveling.

It's something else when you've got the materials. You've got these big 94 pound bags of Portland cement. That you've got to heave up and over.

And I was thinking about that hupomone, bear up under. When I get one of these bags and carry it from the back of the truck to the garage. And from the garage out to the hole in the ground.

And up and over and down. I thought I'm bearing up under. I've got this big heavy load here.

That's mashing all the discs in my lower back. And this is hupomone. I bear up under.

This is a special kind of work. It's the kind of work that compresses your spine. It's different than a repetitive task.

It's different than something where your mind strays. When you're bearing up under something. You really focus on that thing at the time.

If you're carrying a 94 pound sack of cement. 94 pounds doesn't sound like a lot. We used to throw around 100 pound bags of feed.

But as I get older it becomes more significant. And when you do a lot of them it becomes even more significant. But did you ever notice if you're carrying something that's about as heavy as you can carry.

You can't really be distracted. You don't think about something else. Your mind does not stray.

When you're carrying something that heavy. All you can think about is how quickly can I get this. And can I balance it on my thigh.

And how can I get this over. And you don't think about anything but that thing. And hupomone when you're bearing up under.

That's the kind of problem that consumes your attention. It becomes kind of uppermost in your mind all the time. You keep returning to it.

Hupomone is endurance. It's not just bearing long. You can run a long distance.

And that's a kind of endurance. But your mind can wander. You can quote scripture to yourself and pray.

And there's all kinds of things you can do when you're running. Talk to somebody if you're running with someone. It's a great way if you can between puffs of breath and that.

If you're running at a conversational pace. Early on you can talk. And then you notice the

conversation dwindling away as you get to the end.

But hupomone has the idea you're doing a task. And it's like carrying this heavy weight. That's all you can think about during the time you're carrying it.

It kind of takes away all your other stray thoughts. So it's translated patience here. Jesus says, Look, I'm walking around in these lampstands.

I see you. I'm not off in heaven 150 million light years away. I'm walking around your lampstand.

I'm looking at you. I know the results that you've been able to achieve. I know the toil that you put into it to make those results.

And I know that you've borne up under heavy loads. He says, I didn't get a second hand report. I didn't have an angel reporting to an angel reporting to an angel who reported to me.

I was walking right past your lampstand. I looked over and I saw you do these things. Don't think that Christ is far away because he's not.

He sees. J.K. Sings a great song, My Savior Knows. My Every Sorrow.

He knows. In fact, that's the name of the song, He Knows. It talks about all the different things that Jesus knows.

He was here. He walked among us. He knows exactly what it's like.

He's been more than a mile in our moccasins. I know your patience. Hupomone.

And he also knows that you cannot bear those who are evil. Cannot bear those who are evil. Cannot endure those who are evil is what it says.

And this is what bastazo means to put up with. You see them. You weed them out.

You have no tolerance for them. You can't tolerate it at all. You see these that are evil.

Out the door they go. And we're going to find that this is a great, very interesting characteristic of the Ephesians. And it comes right up in the front as the commendation.

And Jesus, you know, people do analysis of all these letters. There's the commendation and then there's the criticism and then there's the encouragement, the hope of reward at the end. We'll see that pattern.

You cannot bear with those who are evil. So they know how to weed out no goodniks, you know, bad influences in their church. And you have tested those who say they are apostles.

This is perazzo, which means to scrutinize something. You figure out if it's what it purports to be

or not. So they are able to discern good and evil.

They know what's right and they know what's wrong. They would watch TBN and say, you know what, that's just not helpful there. I'm not going to watch that program anymore.

I don't believe there are latter-day apostles. I don't believe that guy really is healing those people he's smacking on the head. You cannot bear those who are evil.

You've tested those who say they are apostles and are not. From that day to this, there have been people saying they are apostles and they are not. How many apostles have there ever been in history? Twelve.

Twelve and only twelve. Not thirteen. Matthias was not an apostle.

There were the eleven that walked with Jesus and there was Paul born out of time. Matthias who was elected. Other people told him he was an apostle.

He wasn't. All these other people who say, I'm the apostle of the church of Bug Scuffle, Arkansas. He's not.

He's not an apostle. There are people who say they are apostles and are not. Why would someone say he was an apostle? What is that saying when you say, hey, I'm an apostle? You're saying, I am in the chain of command and I can tell pastors how the cow ate the cabbage.

I can tell pastors what Jesus wants their churches to do. You're not just saying I'm a pastor. You're saying I am a minister to pastors.

I can pass the word to pastors. I am in that conduit of... And if you say you're an apostle, then you say I at least have the potential to communicate inspired truth. Because the apostles authored, either directly or indirectly, the New Testament canon.

So if you say I'm an apostle, you're saying I at least have the ex-cathedra capability. I can speak and it's as good as gospel. Well, this is a pretty high and mighty thing to take to yourself.

How did you arrive at this conclusion? If you weren't an eyewitness of the Lord, then you must have been like Paul. Did you get caught up to the third heaven? Did Jesus teach you for two years in the desert? What exactly are you saying about yourself when you say you're an apostle? Who told you that thou wast an apostle? Say they are apostles or not. These people have figured out that that's not right.

You want to know one of the reasons? Because they had already seen a genuine apostle. John ministered personally to these churches and John taught them well. And they know what it takes to be an apostle.

If somebody says I'm an apostle, you know what? We had a real apostle here and you ain't him.

And you're not qualified. And you have found them to be liars.

It's not just their status, but it goes to what they say. Because they speak, they take authority to themselves that they don't deserve, and then they're going to speak something that is not the truth. And in verse 3, you have persevered.

Now guess what? Persevered is the same word we had up in verse 2 that's translated patience. Hupomonene. Hupomonene.

Here it says you have had patience, literally. Ekes hupomonene. And you have patience.

So we have a fresh word here for patience which is the same root that we had up above. Bastadzo. You were not able to bear those who are evil.

It says you have been able to bear. You have been able to endure. You have patience.

This is four times now that patience and endurance have been mentioned under hupomonene and bastadzo, right? So they are a persevering crowd. They can endure. There are things that they won't put up with and they won't endure.

They say that's wrong. I'm not going to tolerate that. And I'm going to bear up and I'm going to be patient.

You have need of faith and patience so that after you have suffered a while you'll receive the promises. They've got that necessary endurance. They know what to endure and they know what not to endure.

And that's a good thing. They're commended for that. And once again, you have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary.

So you have sort of a chiasm here, don't you? I know your works and your labor, your patience and your bearing up that you don't do. You've gotten rid of the apostles is right in the middle, these false apostles. You've persevered and have patience.

You've labored for my name's sake and you've not become weary. So you start and end with works. Inside of that you have patience and endurance.

And right at the center you know what is not true. You've weeded out the liars and the false apostles. Nevertheless, verse 4, I have this against you.

Now before we go, people tend to gloss over the commendation and get to the bad part. These are wonderful things. They're commended.

And what does that tell us? These things that the Lord Jesus Christ commends in the church are things that we hopefully will cultivate and develop and have. We have need of endurance and

patience. And we should labor and not grow weary.

That's looking for opportunities for love to find expression, for your gifting in the spiritual realm to find expression. Don't get weary. Don't get tired.

Don't get up in your 60s or your 70s and say, well, it's for the younger people. If God is still giving you good air to breathe and your heart is still beating and you can still function at all, then there's an arena for ministry. There's a lot of things you can do.

You can pray. You can speak the truth. You can encourage.

You can exhort. You can visit. There are many things.

People decide that because they can't pitch in and bale hay that their ministry days are over. And I had a whole church full of people who had to be convinced that they still had opportunities because they defined ministry in physical terms. Well, I've got to teach or I've got to travel or I've got to produce some tangible thing.

No, you don't. The wisdom that you can share, the encouragement that you can give, the smile that you can offer to someone, the phone call of encouragement, the little visit running by. There are all kinds of things that people at any stage of their physical well-being can do.

As long as you have life and breath and you have God's Holy Spirit and you're where you should be spiritually, you have ministry opportunities. And don't think you don't. Patience, perseverance, endurance.

Look for the places to labor. We're not a sit, soak and sour Christianity, but we want to get our horse firmly in front of the cart. And the energy, the horse power that comes from that is God's Word and God's Spirit.

But it doesn't mean we don't have a cart rolling down the road. Nevertheless, I have this against you. You have left your first love.

What happens if you continue to endure and you continue to work, but the motivation changes. Initially their work and their endurance and their motivation for all of these things was their love for the Lord and their love for one another. But they've left that love. It's gone away.

Now they're kind of hollow. The motivation at the core has gone away and it's like a tree that the heartwood has gone out of. You still have the form and you can still sustain weight and you can even still push out fruit and so on, but your heartwood has eroded away.

The reason for which you do these has changed. What is the cure for this? Two things. Remember from where you have fallen.

Remember when you had that burning desire. Remember what the disciples on the road to Emmaus said to each other? Did not our hearts burn within us when He talked with us on the way? Have we lost our enthusiasm for the treasures that are in the Word of God, the aspects of God's character that are revealed? It's not just the joy of simple discovery. There are people who just like to solve a puzzle for its own sake.

But to discover things about God, things that are meaningful, things that reveal His character, things about the Lord Jesus Christ and about how He walked among us and how He lived the life that we are called to live. Some people get hooked on the revelation aspect. They used to call it the breakthrough.

Oh, I had a breakthrough. I understand something. It's not just solving the little puzzle or having a new discovery.

It's what it means. What did you find and what does it mean to you? Little children unwrap a present at their birthday or at Christmas and they see what's in the box and they say, oh, that's great. Then they lay it aside and they want to open another present.

It's all of the joys in the discovery. And what you hope is that you've picked a present that when they find it, it's like we were talking about Sarah with her shoes, you find them and you say, oh, wow, I love this. The little kids say, I love it.

And they just carry it around and you think, boy, that really hit the spot. They found something that is really meaningful to them. And we hope that as we study the Word of God we find something that's meaningful to us that comes back up in our thinking and is a part of our meditation and it's a part of our motivation and it fuels the love that we have for God.

That's why He starts out saying, remember. Remember how it was. Most people always say, oh, I've lost the joy of my... It's not the joy of your salvation that you have to try to go back and recapture.

Remember what close relationship with God is. It's the same thing in a marriage or a good friendship or in family. You can get busy doing other things and your fellowship can erode because you just haven't really been paying attention.

You say, boy, I remember when I just couldn't wait to be with that person or to share things with that... When's the last time I called up my mother? When's the last time I did this, that and the other? And you remember and you say, well, why can't it be that way again? And it can. You just have to devote some attention to it. It's not like things are gone and can never be restored.

You just have to get back the values and the goals and the priorities that you had at that time and it'll be like that again. And that's what Jesus says. He says, remember therefore from where you have fallen.

Because this is a fall. You're still working and laboring and bearing up and enduring, but you've fallen from the place where it really had meaning. I know you're still working and laboring and enduring, but the love that made it all worthwhile has slipped away.

Remember how it was. It can be that way again. Change your mind.

Repent is almost a bad way to phrase it in English anymore. Change your mind. Metanoeo is what we have here.

Do the first works. Now, he doesn't say that they've stopped doing any works, does he? But the qualitative definition of those works changes when they're not motivated by love. They're going to be doing the same works, but when the love returns, they're going to be doing the first works.

They're going to be doing the works they were doing before. It's not that the work is going to change. The endurance won't change.

The labors won't change. What's going to change is the why. Remember from where you have fallen.

Change your mind. Get back to the place where you have love and joy and the heartily as unto the Lord aspect. That is going to transform the works that you're doing back into being the first works, the great works, the primary works.

Otherwise, I will come to you quickly. This quickly, again, like we've seen other places in the New Testament, basically means suddenly. I will come to you suddenly and remove your lampstand from its place.

Remember, he's speaking to the church corporately here. And that assembly, if it doesn't reflect the glory of Christ, if it's not a place where love for the Lord is engendered, well, it's going to disappear. And this church is not in Ephesus.

Sometime after these epistles, the church at Ephesus died away. Unless you change your mind. It kind of reminds us of the last few verses of Malachi.

Your hearts need to turn, else I will smite the earth with a curse. You're going to be removed unless you change your mind. But this you have, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now, nobody knows exactly what the Nicolaitan heresy was. In a nutshell, Nikos is like Nike, means victory. Laos means people.

It means dominating the people. This was some sort of system whereby people were organized and taken advantage of. The Nicolaitans organized people and reaped from them and got something from their labor.

They were victors over the people. To the victors go the spoils. And they were despoiling the people in some fashion.

And I suspect it was in the spiritual realm. And that happens in a lot of churches today where people get people tithing and get people working and get people doing a lot of stuff so that they can build bigger buildings and have their own little empire. And it's ridden on the backs of the people in the congregation.

And they're not being spiritually fed. They're not being nurtured and brought up in love to the standard of a mature man like we read about in Ephesians. And that's what the Nicolaitans, from the name, that's what we conclude.

He says, You hate that. You know that that's not good. And that's great.

But you need to get back to this first love. Well, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life.

And that's what we're going to have to pick up next time. We have a wonderful study on the tree of life and what that means. I'm sorry we didn't get to it this morning.

But it's the first thing we'll do next Sunday. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the word that you have delivered to us.

And even down through the centuries and 2,000 years after it was written. It ministers to our souls. It shows us what we can do to change our minds and to live in a way that's pleasing in your sight.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enlighten us as we view the tasks that lie before us and the details of our own lives so that we can redeem the time even though the days are evil and we can fulfill the calling for which you saved us and for which you have left us here on this earth. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.