

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, January 9, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**The Church's Greatest Danger - Revelation 2:1-7**

**Introduction:** Brother Mike just told you about one of the needs of our church – a new roof, and I hope you will prayerfully consider contributing to that fund. Sometimes we look around and see all the needs of the church and it's hard to prioritize them, because they all are important.

But this morning, what would you say if I asked you what would be the greatest danger that churches face today? If I took a survey today, no doubt some would name things such as dwindling finances, lack of commitment, declining attendance, or maybe even the worry that worldliness is finding its way into the church. And in a lot of local churches, those answers would apply.

Jesus had something to say about this issue, and His answer will probably not set to well with most people. Let's see what He has to say about it.

First, let's turn to **Matthew 24:12 (NIV)** where we find Jesus telling His disciples about the condition the church will be in just prior to His second coming. He said, *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,"*

Then, let's turn to Rev. 2 where we find Jesus addressing the church at Ephesus. Now before we read this, you need to know that this church was a great church. The Apostle Paul had written to this church earlier referring to them as: holy, forgiven, and redeemed saints who had been sealed by the Holy Spirit making them fellow citizens of the household of God.

And here in Rev. 2:2-3, even Jesus praises them for their *"hard work and perseverance."* He admonishes them because of their intolerance of wickedness, their spiritual discernment in choosing leaders, and for the fact that they had *"endured hardships for"* His *"name, and"* had *"not grown weary"* in doing so. It was a truly wonderful church.

But then Jesus tells them, echoing His prophecy of Matthew 12:24, *"Yet, I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."* I can see and hear this congregation and probably every other good and wonderful congregation of believers down through the ages gasping in disbelief. *"Jesus, did we hear you correctly? Are you saying that even though a church may possess these many wonderful positives, this one negative will outweigh all those positives combined?"* And Jesus would reply with an emphatic, *"YES!"* See...I told you His answer wouldn't set too well.

Jesus had something against this church, and it was a biggie. He was. In effect, telling these church members that unless they had a passionate, unrestrained, and unconditional love for God in their hearts, it wouldn't matter how many good things they may do or how many good qualities they may possess, they would all be worthless. In fact, the Holy Spirit did inspire the Apostle Paul to say that very thing for he wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV):**

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

In other words, if God has me and my love for Him is pure, then He has all I can give or do. But if He does not have me, I can't buy or earn just love-on-the-surface my way into His favor.

You see, here's the truth about our relationship with God: In the beginning, God had us. He has us because He created us. But because God created man with free will, that meant man had the ability to either choose Him or reject Him. And when man initially chose God's companionship and fellowship, and *"they walked together in the cool of the day,"* God had what He wanted. He had man's love. Man's first love was God, and all was well in the earth. In fact, when someone once asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was, He said, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."* So, God had man's love and He was our first love.

But when man fell to Satan's temptations and decided that the things he offered looked, tasted, felt, and sounded better than God, then that first love quickly faded and then God no longer had people who loved only

Him. Instead, God didn't have a people at all, for they didn't love Him with everything they had. To God, a divided love looks like no love at all.

The term, "*first love*" is interesting. Do you remember your first love, and how you'd do just about anything to be with your sweetie? That was when you had that something within you that would make long distances short; or cold weather warm; just so you could be with them. I've seen boys act plumb goofy and totally out of character just to be able to spend time with their first love. I've also seen guys punch holes in the wall when they lost that first love.

Well, what's true in romance is also true in your relationship with the Lord. Do you remember when you first got saved - how you responded to God's love, and the way you felt about Him and His church? Do you remember some of the effects of that first love? Do you remember the joy in your heart, the desire to share His love, the freedom you felt from the weight of sin, and the longing to spend time with God in church and in His Word? Do you remember how your entire being was wrapped up in God and His will, and His love completely possessed your personality? Well, is that the way it is now? Is that "*first love*" feeling toward God still there to the point where nothing else even matters? Or has that "*first love*" faded? Has it been replaced by other things that take up your time and attention?

What I'm getting at is simply the fact that it is so easy to allow other things to come between us and our relationship with God. It's so easy for us both individually and collectively as a church, to lose our love for God. And the result is; we lose our spiritual health and vitality.

A couple of months ago, a friend of mine experienced some vision problems. He went to his optomologist, but he couldn't find anything wrong with his eyes. However, his symptoms alerted him to the possibility that there could be something else going on in his head. So, he referred him to a neurologist. After going through many tests, my friend was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, and needed surgery. Then, he would have to follow up with many other tests to determine where the cancer cells came from. And then, he would have to undergo radiation and chemo treatments.

I told you that story because what was true with my friend medically may be true with people spiritually – even many church members. I wonder how many seemingly good and faithful and healthy church members, are attending and even working in church with their spiritual health is in critical condition.

What are some of the signs of lost love? Here are a few spiritual health tests. Apply them to yourself. Be honest. Evaluate your real spiritual life accurately. You know and God knows.

**Test # One: Lost Joy:** If you have lost your joy in serving the Lord, or if you go to church out of a sense of duty; you have lost love out of your heart. Nehemiah said, "*The joy of the Lord is my strength.*" When you lose joy, you lose power.

**Test # Two: Lost or Displaced Interest.** If you have a diminishing or little interest in the church, its ministries, its mission, its worship, its outreach, or its fellowship, the love of God has left your heart.

Psychologists say that people who lose interest in one thing will turn to other things. So if you've lost interest in the church and the kingdom of God, something is taking its place. It might be material possessions, or pursuits such as career or educational endeavors, or it can be other people such as seeking other relationships. But whatever it is, it's become your mistress or your lover. You've left your first love and chased a fleeting affair. John says, "*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" **1 John 2:15 (NIV)**

**Test # Three: Lost Burden:** If you have no burden for your loved ones; or if you have little or no concern for the lost for whom Jesus died, you've let love escape from your heart.

**Test # Four: Lost Perspective:** If you have a tendency to find fault, be critical, sarcastic, or look down upon people, the love for the family of God has departed. Love covers a multitude of faults.

**Test # Five: Lost Desire:** Do you recall how when you were first saved, and how close your relationship was with God? Do you remember how it felt being so close to God: like you had power with God? Do you recall how when you prayed, it seemed as though heaven came down and when you met other people, you couldn't wait to tell them about Jesus? Have you lost that power, that influence, or that desire? If you have, then you've lost your first love as well.

**Test # Six: Lost Identity:** If you find it easier and easier to talk like the world, act like the world, dress like the world, and be like the world, that's a sure sign that you've lost your first love.

We all need to take those tests, because the number one danger facing the Church today is losing our love for the things of God. This world has a mighty strong influence and pull on us. We're busy rushing from one thing to another. The demands of jobs and the pursuit of pleasure and power and prestige and the attractiveness of sin puts us in the precarious position of gradually losing our love for Christ and His kingdom. And if we lose our love, where will the love for God be found? Nowhere!

This is why we can't go on any farther down this road. God's church must stop! We must return! We must repent!

If we're going to turn back to God, it has to begin in the hearts of church members. Sin-loving, pleasure-craving, booze-drinking, Sunday-desecrating church members will never save America. The world looks at them and says, "*If they are Christians, them I am too, 'cause they don't look or act any different than I do.*" It's time for some Church Members to repent and return to God for even Jesus said to the Ephesian church, "*Repent, and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*" **(Rev. 2:5b NIV)**

It's time we repented and came back to God. It is time, as the Lord said to Solomon, that we "*humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways.*" **(2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV))**. The time has come! It is either return to God or sit by and watch our land quickly deteriorate.

What is the church's greatest danger? It's allowing business, pleasure, and the pursuit of material things cause us to forget God, turn our backs on personal devotions, excuse ourselves from worship and service, and put other things ahead of God. Our greatest danger is losing our love of God.

With a burdened heart this morning, I'm asking us to look deep into our heart of hearts and see where we stand. And if you find yourself empty of the love of God, I pray that you humble yourselves, and seek God's face until His love comes back into your life with power. I urge you to repent and return to God. He is your greatest need. So let His love flood your soul again.

May the words of Fanny Crosby be our prayer today: *Savior, more than life to me, I am clinging, clinging close to Thee; Let Thy precious blood applied, Keep me ever, ever near Thy side. Every day, every hour, Let me feel Thy cleansing power; May Thy tender love to me bind me closer, closer, Lord, to Thee.*

The secret to finding your first love is found in experiencing God's cleansing power every day and every hour.