

Dear Friend,

I have spent many years pondering Jesus' words in the first portion of Matthew 25. When we consider that they were prophetically spoken about the spiritual condition of some people in the last days, I feel obligated to stop and take inventory lest any of the things referred to become part of my life. It speaks to me of a people who no longer have an inner passion for the Word of God. The disciples in Luke 24:32 said: *"Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?"*

My friend, don't ever let your heart get bored or coldly familiar with the Word of God. If it starts to happen, sincerely ask Jesus to rekindle the fire within you. Those who foolishly handled their relationship with Christ could not see when darkness came nor were they aware of the nearness of His coming.

In contrast to this, we see another type of people, just ordinary persons, who simply knew the truth that God would supply all their need. That is why they were able to tell others where it might be found; they knew that Jesus had freely given to them what they had requested to finish the journey in victory.

I have great hope for both you and me. If you didn't love Jesus, most likely you wouldn't have this letter in your hands. And even better, Jesus wouldn't have put it there unless He intended to answer the cry of your heart.

Yours, in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

THE CANDLESTICK

by Carter Conlon

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"
(Revelation 2:1-4).

It is critical that those of us who have been walking with God for any length of time pay special attention to these words. Ephesus was a church that was theologically sound. The followers of Christ tested what was preached and did not tolerate anything that strayed from truth. These were a working people who labored without fainting, but something had happened to them along the way—they had left their first love.

Have you noticed that there is something very attractive about first love? That is why we love weddings! Even the most callous person is strangely warmed inside watching a young couple exchanging vows at the altar—a classic picture of first love. The couple sees no wrong in each other, and they look forward to sharing the rest of their lives together.

Imagine a scene fifteen years later when this same wife is feeling under the weather. Her husband is sitting at her bedside at 3 a.m., holding cough medicine and reading to her its healing ingredients. "Honey, this cough medicine contains 6.2 milligrams of diphenhydramine, which is an antihistamine and a cough suppressant; 2.5 milligrams of phenylephrine, a nasal decongestant."

Do you love Jesus? Do you really love Him?

She simply looks at her husband and asks, "Why are you reading all this to me?"

He replies, "Well, there are a lot of frauds on the market, and I'm not willing to go to all this trouble and have you take an inferior product."

Suddenly she looks up at him and asks, "Do you love me?"

"Of course I love you," he says. "It's 3 a.m. and I'm sitting here discussing with you the truth of the healing that I hold in my hand."

Remember when Jesus appeared to His disciples on the shore and asked Peter a similar question? Jesus turned to him and asked, *"...Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou*

me more than these?” (John 21:15). We do not know exactly what He was referring to when He said “these,” but it must have been something within reach, something He was pointing to.

Perhaps it was the boats, the oars, the nets, the friends. Peter must have loved the smell of the sea, handling the oars, the thrill of casting his nets into the water and bringing in fish, the camaraderie that he shared with his friends. Suddenly Jesus is asking him, “Do you love Me more than these? Do you love Me more than the things that you have become familiar with? Do you love Me more than what you have grown accustomed to tasting, touching, feeling and handling?”

Peter could have replied, “Well, I am here, aren’t I?” The Scriptures tell us that when Peter saw Jesus standing on the shore and one of the disciples recognized it was the Master, Peter leaped from the boat into the water. There was a love in his heart. He could have said to Jesus, “Didn’t you notice that I got here first? I had my seat reserved at the fire before the rest of the people even arrived. Why would You ask me if I love You? You know that I do!”

Today I could ask you this same question in Christ’s stead. Do you love Jesus? Do you really love Him? Some would answer, “Well, of course, I love Jesus. I would not be reading this if I didn’t love Jesus. I would not be studying the Scriptures and examining truth if I didn’t love Jesus. I would not be going on missions trips if I didn’t love Jesus. It is quite obvious that I love Him.”

Let us look again at the husband who carries on with his duty to properly present the medicine that he holds in his hand. Once again, in a voice barely above a whisper, his wife asks him, “Do you love me?”

In reality, this husband has become much like that church in Ephesus—concerned about having the right product, concerned about getting up because of duty and doing the right thing, concerned about the appearances of love. Yet Jesus said to this church, “*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Revelation 2:4–5).

***You will find
that a lot of
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When I first came to Christ, I could hardly wait for opportunities to read the Word of God. Winning the lost seemed as easy as breathing. There was no program involved—I simply loved Jesus with all my heart. People would ask me, “What happened to you? Why do you always seem to be so calm? What is the difference that I see in your life?”

I did not open my mouth and explain, “Well, I have been testing and proving those who claim to be apostles, and I found them to be liars.” Neither did I tell them that it was because I had gone on a missions trip or had been working in the house of God. The answer was simply, “I love Jesus. He has come into my heart and transformed my life. He has broken the power of the things that once bound me, and

He has given me hope for a future. He is teaching me how to be a good husband and father.” I had a simple answer because in my heart, I loved Him. People are attracted to that relationship of first love.

■ A THIRD TIME

Having just answered Jesus’ question, Peter was probably settling down by the fire when Jesus once again asked him the same question, “Do you love Me?” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.” Perhaps Peter should not have been so quick to answer, for he was asked the same question one more time.

“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee...” (John 21:17). By this point, Peter was exasperated and essentially said, “Lord, You know all things. You have already asked me this twice, and this is the third time. You know that I love You. Why would You keep asking me that question?” Jesus answers him succinctly:

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me” (John 21:18–19).

Jesus was saying, “Peter, just embrace Me once again. Do you remember those early days around the table when I told you I was going to Jerusalem and that I was going to be betrayed and crucified? Remember that day when you said, ‘I will go with You and I will die with You. Where You are, there I will be?’ You did not say that out of duty, you

said it because you loved Me. Now I am asking you to stretch out your hands and embrace Me one more time. Embrace Me in the way you did in those first moments.”

This is the same thing that the wife was saying to her husband as he dutifully read the contents of the cough syrup: “I just want you to embrace me. I want to know that I am the love of your life and not a labor in your life. I want to know that I am still as important to you today as I was that day we spoke those vows to one another. I don’t want you to read to me, I want you to hold me!”

The candlestick is the light of first love. It is what makes Christ in us attractive to people who are outside of the kingdom of God.

There are men reading this whose marriage is not going well. Could it be because you have lost your first love? I believe if you will reach out and embrace your wife again, you will find that she still wants to be given to you, that she still desires to walk with you. God has put it in her heart to be loved by you. You will find that a lot of healing will come into your home if you will just simply reach out, stop talking and start holding.

The Lord went on to say in Revelation, “...To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). I believe Jesus was saying this to the church in Ephesus as well as to His Church today: “Will

you simply love Me as you once did—when no cost was too great and no journey was too far? Will you reach out and allow Me to lead you? Will you embrace My will for your life and walk with Me wherever I go? If you are willing, I will unlock to you the full victory of Calvary and it will be strength and life to you.”

■ THAT WHICH MAKES US ATTRACTIVE

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Revelation 2:5).

So what is the candlestick? Simply put, the candlestick is the light of first love—that bright, burning flame. It is what makes Christ in us attractive to people who are outside of the kingdom of God. It is what makes our children want to follow God.

Have you ever noticed a young couple in a restaurant eating together, so in love that they are not even aware of the food on their plates? They are staring into each other’s eyes while the food is getting cold. Then you look at the same couple twenty-five years later—he is reading the newspaper and she is looking out of the window. The only words they have to say to each other are, “Nice potatoes.” “Yeah, and these peas aren’t bad.”

There is nothing attractive about that relationship, nothing that would cause young people to look at them and say, “Wow! I would love to be married someday and have a relationship like that!” Likewise, when our relationship with Jesus degenerates into simply testing and proving, laboring and concentrating on not fainting, keeping right and avoiding the fraudulent, nothing attractive remains. There is nothing about

our relationship with Christ that anybody in the world is going to desire, let alone ask about.

Yet that is the danger we can fall into. It is so easy to become an Ephesus church, focusing on doing everything right. Right doctrine, right works, right programs—all at the expense of losing what was so precious in the beginning. God help the bride of Christ who suddenly needs a pamphlet to talk about her Bridegroom. “Can I tell you about Jesus? Wait, I have it here somewhere. There is a pamphlet here that describes Him. Yes, let me tell you about my Bridegroom.” No! Our hearts should be captivated! Just as it says in the Song of Solomon, “Have you seen him? He is the fairest among ten thousand! He is altogether lovely!” (see Song of Solomon 5:10–16). *That* is first love.

Perhaps you started out so in love with Jesus, yet somewhere down the road that love has degenerated. It has become all about works, doctrine, and learning to endure.

■ RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE

I don’t know about you, but I want to finish this race the way I started. I want my marriage to finish even better than it began. I want my love for Jesus to increase. I don’t want to preach in different places and have people conclude, “Wow, he sure is

theologically accurate. He sure can rip apart the false prophets. He sure can labor without fainting.” I would much rather people notice, “He sure does love Jesus! Everything in his being, everything in his voice, everything in his eyes simply exudes a relationship that I would like to have!”

How do we come back to our first love?

Perhaps you started out so in love with Jesus, yet somewhere down the road that love has degenerated. In your heart you know that your relationship with Him is not what it used to be. It has become all about works, doctrine, and learning to endure. If this is the case, Jesus would say to you today, “If you can overcome this declension and get back to your first love, all that I have will be yours again. I will fill your heart with compassion. There will be light in your eyes, and people will ask you the reason for your hope.”

Don't let your candlestick be taken away in this critical hour.

How do we come back to our first love? I believe it starts with asking the Lord to ignite our hearts once again, and then simply reaching out and embracing Him. Jesus told Peter, “Stretch out your hands.” He was talking about embracing

the Lord—embracing the heart and will of God; walking together with Him in intimacy again. Don't let your candlestick be taken away in this critical hour. Come back to your first love, whether you have walked with God for fifty years or for ten. Simply come back to that place where you love Him with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind and all of your strength. We must have the flame of first love burning brightly in this dark hour. *This* is what our testimony should be; *this* is what will bring Him glory in our generation!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

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