

First Love

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.
(Rev 2:4 NIV)

February 14th, Valentine's Day, has become the day when we remember love. It seems appropriate somehow in one of the greyest and coldest months of the year, that we have something good and nice to celebrate. I'm sure that's how the card manufacturers see it too!



Love is, of course, a key aspect of the Christian faith. God is love (1 John 4:8), a love which was shown to us in the sending of his Son, Jesus, to die for our sins (1 John 4:10). Love is also how we should respond to the God who loved us first. In fact, Jesus summarizes the duty of God's people as loving God and loving our neighbour (Mark 12:30-31).

Unfortunately, it's easy for love to become a cold duty. Just as Valentine's Day can become the one day in year when we know we'd better buy some combination of flowers, chocolates and a card or there'll be trouble, so the Christian life can become a set of duties to be completed, rather than a loving relationship with the Lord of the universe.

We're looking at the letters Jesus sent to the seven churches in our evening services at the moment. In the first, to the church in Ephesus, we find exactly this problem (Revelation 2:1-7). In so many ways they were a strong church. They worked hard, suffered well, dealt with false teaching and above all kept going (Revelation 2:2-3). But Jesus says he has one thing against them:

You have forsaken the love you had at first. (Revelation 2:4 NIV)

In the Bible, the church is often pictured as the bride of Christ, and so we have the picture here of the love of the bride for the bridegroom going cold and becoming duty-bound and formulaic. It's a picture of a marriage on the rocks, because love has gone cold.

Perhaps, if you're honest, that's you. Knowing and loving God used to be such an important thing in your life. You loved to read your Bible to hear from God, to pray to speak to him, to sing his praises and to go to church to be with his people. You were excited when there were opportunities to serve him, speak for him to others, and live your life for him. Now you're going through the motions and soon enough you won't even be doing that. Perhaps, if we're honest, Jesus might say that about many of us.

Jesus has a solution in v.5:

Consider how far you have fallen! 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 2:5 NIV)

We must remember where we used to be and still should be, in other words we should remember what that love should look like. We must repent and go back to the start. And just note, we don't go back and try and whip up a feeling. We go back and do what we did at the start. We read, pray, praise, meet, speak and serve.

Perhaps February would be a good month to reflect on whether we have lost our first love of Jesus. If so we must repent. The consequences of not doing would be dire in Ephesus. It would be the end of the church. Let's not let that happen in Deeplish and Newbold!

Perhaps you're reading this and thinking that you've never had that sort of faith, but you'd like it. What would it be to know God like that! Well, if you want to know Jesus with that kind of passion, repent (turn from your sin and ask him for forgiveness) and believe (turn to him and put your trust in him, living each step of your life for him). That would be the best possible thing you could do this February.