



# Nails in the Coffin

SIX DEATH RATTLES IN THE THROAT OF A LOCAL CHURCH

## 2. Leftover, Lackluster, Lukewarm Love for the Lord

### JOSHUA 23:11

<sup>11</sup> So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

### MARK 12:28-30

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

<sup>29</sup> "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

### EPHESIANS 6:23-24

<sup>23</sup> Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.'

### REVELATION 2:1-7

<sup>1</sup> "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

<sup>5</sup> Remember the height from which 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. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

## Notes on the Context—

### *A church with a dynamic history*

1. The church at Ephesus was planted by the Apostle Paul in 52 AD when twelve not-very-knowledgeable believers were saved, baptized in water, and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7).
2. Paul stayed at Ephesus for three years (52-55 AD) during which time the church grew mightily, experienced powerful signs and wonders, endured great spiritual warfare, impacted the entire city, and sent missionaries out to preach and plant churches throughout the entire province (Acts 19:8–20:1; 1/2 Corinthians).
3. About a year later (56/57 AD) Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, met with the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus and gave them a farewell charge, urging them to shepherd the church and guard the flock carefully against those who would try to distort the truth and destroy the Lord's church (Acts 20:17-38).
4. A few years later (60/61/62 AD), Paul wrote Ephesians from confinement in Rome. He concluded that letter with this strangely foreshadowing benediction: "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love" (Ephesians 6:24).
5. Paul appointed Timothy as pastor of the church at Ephesus; Timothy served there for several years, from 62 to 65 AD, and perhaps beyond (1 Timothy 1:3).
6. The Apostle John pastored the church at Ephesus (according to the early church historian Eusebius) from around 70 AD till his death around 100 AD (absent for a year while exiled to the Island of Patmos).

### *A church with a dying heart*

1. In John's vision on the Island of Patmos (95 AD), Jesus commends the church at Ephesus (now about 43 years old) for being hardworking, for persevering through hardships, for hating false doctrine, and for being intolerant toward false teachers. But none of these were enough for Jesus.
2. Jesus criticized the church at Ephesus for having forsaken their first love and fallen from their spiritual heights. He commands them to repent of their leftover, lackluster, lukewarm love and return to their first love—or face the removal of their lampstand.

## Nails in the Coffin—

1. When a local church is passionately in love with Jesus, that love is the engine that drives all forward and upward motion. When love for Jesus begins to languish and fade, every part of the church begins to slow and stagnate.
2. When love for Jesus begins to fade, love for the body of Christ begins to fade and love for our neighbors begins to fade. When we don't love Jesus passionately, we can't love people properly (1 John 4:19-20). Loving Jesus inspires loving what Jesus loves. A church without passionate love for Jesus and passionate love for people needs a powerful resurrection or a proper burial.
3. When believers begin to misidentify love for religious systems and structures and traditions as love for Jesus, they lose sight of the One who is "altogether lovely" (Song of Solomon 5:16) and personal, loving, vibrant, thrilling relationship with Jesus suffers. Jesus is not a building or a schedule or a ministry or a style of church service. Jesus is a Person—the divine, radiant Son of God.
4. Within a body of believers, lukewarm love is contagious. At first, individual believers forsake their first love for Jesus, but that condition can spread like cancer so that the church as a whole begins to die.

## Notes to the Congregation—

1. Joshua commanded the people of God when they came into the promised land: "Be very careful to love the LORD your God" (Joshua 23:11). In a world where many believers and churches are deceived and distracted, we must maintain a constant, careful reading of our spiritual temperature and the vibrancy of our relationship with Jesus. If we're not careful, spiritual heat and love can evaporate without our recognizing it.

▲ Are your spiritual eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2), so that you are continually studying him, analyzing him from every vantage point, learning more about him, getting to know him better, and finding yourself never ceasing to be amazed and thrilled by him?

▲ Are you regularly expressing love and appreciation and thanksgiving to Jesus through prayer, worship, singing, declaring your devotion, and whispering "sweet nothings" to him throughout the day?

▲ Is your love for Jesus producing an ever growing loyalty to the lordship of Jesus, so that, just as he has promised never to leave or forsake you, you are absolutely determined never to leave or forsake him? Do you have a deep desire to please him? Is bringing joy to the heart of Jesus becoming the joy of your life?

▲ Are you influencing the rest of your church family by loving Jesus unashamedly and unreservedly through expressive praise and worship and testimony in their midst? Are you adding to the love-for-the-Lord-level in the congregation? Is this local church more in love with Jesus because of you?

▲ Are you looking forward with great anticipation to spending the rest of your life and eternity with Jesus?

2. Let's press in to know Jesus more. The more we know him, the more we'll love him. Let's focus more and more on his love for us. The more we discover and discern and delight in his love for us, the more we'll love him in return.

3. Let's be a church where our passionate love for Jesus welcomes the presence and power of Jesus into our midst every time we gather together. Let's be a first-love, fresh-love, fiery-love, fanatical-love body of believers!