

First Love—the Ultimate Issue

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.

The older I get the more I realize the great gulf that stood between me and the Lord, the impossibility of me ever reaching God, or ever being able to satisfy God. But praise the Lord! He was able to span that mighty gulf at Calvary! All the resistance that we may have offered up in our lives to the Lord Jesus, we must testify here this morning that He broke through to us by His amazing mercy, grace and love. And I am so thankful and grateful this morning that much of our worship and time together has been focused on the love of God for us because that is what is on my heart. It was what was on my heart the previous time I shared, and today I want to continue in that same line of love. We are quickly approaching the end of this age of grace, this age in which God has determined that He will pour forth all of His grace upon mankind, in order that man might respond to His grace and His love and draw many into His kingdom. However, this age of grace is soon to come to an end. This past year I have had that sensing down in my spirit that His return is very close, that the end of this age is very near, and I am sure that many of you also sense that.

The End of this Age

In Matthew 24 and Luke 21 the Lord shared with His disciples what would be the end of this age, and the way people would be at the end of this age. He said that basically lawlessness will abound, and certainly we have really experienced that in the last year. Hatred would abound; such hate that you can see and feel, it is so intense. He said the Christians would be persecuted for His namesake, and we see that happening. I recently prayed with a sister that was undergoing great pressure and persecution at her job because she is a Christian.

Brothers and sisters, especially for you younger ones that are still working, it is out there, and it is going to grow even stronger in these last days. The Lord has warned us of this and said that people's hearts will grow cold. He was not just talking about unbelievers; He was talking about believers whose hearts would grow cold in this atmosphere that we are in, this atmosphere of expelling the Lord from everything. When you expel the Lord, you expel His love, you expel His grace, expel His mercy. And what is left but the coldness of men's hearts, manifesting the sin that is part of our nature. That is the last days.

He also said that it would be like the days of Noah when the Lord said, "I cannot take it anymore. The people have become so evil, even their very thoughts are evil continuously before Me. They were all rejecting the Lord except Noah and his family. Isn't that amazing?! It had come down to just one family. That's how long the Lord suffered with the people that He had created. He loved them and Noah had preached to them one hundred and twenty years while he was building that ark. It was a testimony to God. He was saying, "God is the way of your salvation. This ark that I am building represents God's love for you, the way to escape from your tragedy and bondage of evil that you are in." But the people did not see it. In fact I am pretty sure that they despised Noah and his family. They probably did their best to persecute him, but we know

how that ended; the Lord's judgment came upon the world. And the Lord's judgment will come again and most likely very soon. At the end of this age we have reached that second cycle.

Humanism

I think we all sense it. I think I can sum up the spirit that we see in the world today particularly in the United States. It is a spirit of humanism, and it originated with Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, we have their genes, and simple nature has passed them on to us. But what is the flaw of humanism? It says, "I want to live on my own; I want to live without having to depend on God. I want to take that up myself." In other words, the enemy's challenge to Eve was that you will be like God. Now none of us would say, "Hey, I want to be like God," in the sense that I do not need God anymore. I can be my own God." But that is the base of all men's hearts. It is called lawlessness; rejection of God is lawlessness. And I believe we have come near to the end of this dispensation. The time is short that is remaining for us to realize what is important in our lives. The time is very short.

I think one thing that has happened (it has happened to me) is that we begin to consider things. What is my life really all about? What is really important? What is going to make a difference, not just a temporary difference, but an eternal difference? Isn't that what we are called to be? We are called to be eternal beings. We have eternal life. That means much more than just living forever; that means we have the life of God in us. Even unbelievers will live eternally, but they will be in torment because they have rejected the love of the Lord. That is the issue. They have rejected God's love for them. "I do not need Your love. I do not need Your salvation; I can take care of myself; I am on my own." And we have seen the tragedy of that in many lives.

The Master Key to our Future

So I have been searching what really matters? What really matters now, Lord? I think there is a primary issue, there is an ultimate issue that we have to be concerned about in this day. I believe that it is a master key to our lives and our future with the Lord. We probably all know what a master key is. If you have been in construction work or if you have ever lived in an apartment complex, you understand what a master key is. I worked for the housing authority with four thousand units, and we had a key for every unit. But we also had a master key that could unlock any unit. It was *the* key, the master key, and it was carefully guarded and kept because if the master key was ever lost we had to rekey everything in the housing authority. In other words, it opens every door. So I believe there is a master key that we need to consider in these days, that ultimate thing that the Lord is after.

The Lord is coming soon, and probably as we look through the book of Revelation we would say that the Lord is coming back to judge. He is coming back to judge the world and to judge His church; but is that really what is on the Lord's heart? Certainly He will judge the world; there will be judgment, but I wonder if there is a positive reason for the Lord coming back. Is there a positive reason for His return? Is there a master key? Is there a key to our lives that will draw the Lord Jesus back? Not just to judge the earth but because of His love for us. I think there is.

My last message was on love, the Lord's love for us and our response of love for Him. I am going to read that Scripture again in Jeremiah 31:3 when the nation of Israel was in the most horrible of spiritual conditions. They were worshipping Molech, the god to whom they offered their babies up to. It was a horrible religion, but they were worshipping him, and this was the Lord's word to them. He was in such agony over His people, and He said, "I have loved you with

an everlasting love.” In such a terrible condition he was able to say, “My love for you has not waned.” He certainly hated what they were doing, but He really loved them, and He still loves that nation, thank the Lord.

Then I spoke not only of the Lord’s love for us but of Mary Magdalene. She is the one who had gone to the Lord’s tomb that morning by herself, and the Lord responded to her. She was the first one whom the Lord revealed Himself to after His resurrection; the very first one. And I thought a lot about why it was Mary Magdalene. You will remember that she was the one who had the seven evil spirits cast from her; she had been set at liberty and was free. Certainly she had a lot to rejoice in the Lord about and a deep love for Him. In fact she was there at Calvary. The disciples were not there, except for John, but the rest of them were scattered. John was the one the Lord asked to take care of His mother.

The disciples were in dispersion and confused and fearful, knowing that if they were going to kill the Lord Jesus certainly they would come after them as well. But our dear sister watched the Lord perish on Calvary’s cross, and she followed Him as they took Him to the tomb and buried Him there. She had made plans with the other sisters to come back the next morning to anoint His body, but she could not wait. Her love was so intense for the Lord, she had to be with Him, just be near where He was buried.

Before daybreak the next morning, she went by herself to the tomb just to be there to weep before her Lord at His gravesite. But when she got there, He was not there; His body was gone. She was deeply disturbed, and she rushed back to tell Peter and John what had happened. The Lord’s body was gone; she was so concerned. Where was her Lord? That was her passion for the Lord Jesus. We know they went to the tomb and they also realized that the Lord was not there, and they went back. Somehow they did not cross paths, but our sister shows up once again at the gravesite. A man appears to her and when she looks at Him, she thinks He is the gardener. So she said, “Where have they taken my Lord’s body? Where is He? I need to go to Him. I need to take care of Him. I need to take care of that body.” Finally, the Lord asked her, “Whom are you seeking?” Of course, it was the Lord. And finally our Lord Jesus, it was like the Lord’s heart was exploding and He could not wait any longer, said, “Mary.” And upon hearing her name and the voice, she knew it was the Lord. She did not initially recognize the Lord, for He had to open her eyes. It was a precious revelation that our Lord gave to our sister in order that she could see the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the One who had been to Calvary and died for her and her sin. She was now seeing that He is the risen One, and her heart was full of joy and love.

First Love

Why was she the one whom the Lord responded to and was drawn to? It was Mary Magdalene’s passionate love for our Lord Jesus. That is what drew Him to her, and I believe that is why she was the first one to whom He revealed Himself. She had a passionate love, a pursuing love, a love that could not be satisfied without the Lord Himself. That was the master key that drew the Lord Jesus back to her. And I think it is the master key that is going to draw our Lord Jesus back at the end of this age when He sees His bride full of first love for Him, passionate love.

Love is the most powerful force in the universe. Hate is certainly a strong force, but love conquers hate in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a consummation of the age, and when you look at the book of Revelation it is a clear picture of the consummation of this age. I think a lot of times we tend to focus on the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and at the seventh trumpet there is seven bowls. We get into all the details of Revelation, the judgments, the warfare that is going on,

Satan, the antichrist, the great prophet that can bring fire down from heaven, the trio of evil, all the details, and I think sometimes we miss what the book of Revelation is all about. I believe the master key of Revelation is love.

It begins in Revelation 1:5: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." That is the way it begins. It begins with this note of love. At Calvary's cross He secured something that was so precious to Him. He secured His future bride. The book of Revelation is not just a book of judgment; it is a love story. It begins with love, and praise the Lord we do come to the end of that book, but between verse 1:5 where He says He has loved us and washed us from our sins, we see all the judgments, all the warfare, and all the turmoil. What is that all about? It is the resistance against the Lord having His bride, from His love being totally satisfied, and a bride full of first love. He is against the Lord, and he is against the bride. All that turmoil in Revelation has occurred in opposition to the Lord having His heart satisfied. And what is it that is going to satisfy Him? A bride full of first love. That is what is going to satisfy our Lord.

In Revelation 19:7 he says, "Hallelujah, rejoice for the marriage supper of the Lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready." That was heaven's announcement, and it went across the whole universe. Hallelujah! Rejoice! And it should be. There has been such tremendous opposition, but the enemy has been judged at this point. He has been cast out. All the opposition has been dealt with in judgment. Then finally, in Revelation 21 the announcement comes forth again: "Behold, the bride!" We see the Holy Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. What is that city full of? Crystal clear, pure, love with no impurities. There is gold everywhere, transparent gold representing the very nature of God. What is His nature? It is love. The Bible says, "God is love." That is the only One that is referred to as love in the whole Bible. God is love. It is not, God loves; it is, God *is* love. That is the confirmation.

At some point, if we study the book of Revelation together, we need to remember that it is a love story. Don't get so lost in the details that you lose the big picture of the great conflict that is going on over the Lord having His bride. That is what it is all about, the consummation of the age.

Who do we see in the book of Revelation? Revelation 1:13 says: "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breast with a golden girdle." What do we see? As the Lord consummates the age He gives a revelation of Himself to John to share with us. And it says, "He is robed to His feet; it is a robe of righteousness; it is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is robed in righteousness, and yet there is a golden girdle across His breast. It speaks of love. The golden girdle around the breast is love and the gold is love. This is One full of righteousness and love, and it is not just a casual love; it is a very active love. In those days they wore robes, long flowing garments, but whenever they had work to do or they had to do something they would lift up their robes and put a girdle around them to hold it in place so it would not interfere with their running or working or whatever they were doing. So it is a love full of action, and that action is towards us; that is who we see.

What is He doing? He is in the midst of the seven candlesticks which represent the church, all seven of them. So what is He doing? This one so full of love is looking at His future bride. He is examining her, and we know that He has already said that she will be without spot or wrinkle, but we know that she has many spots and many wrinkles. She is not full of righteousness and love like the bridegroom. How He passionately loves her with first love, but she is not ready. She

is just not ready; there is something lacking. What is the first thing of the seven churches that the Lord points out? What is it that seems to be preeminent in His mind?

Ephesus

The first church He mentions is Ephesus. What does He say about her? He says that she was diligent, she was laboring on His behalf, she was faithful, she endured hardships for His namesake, she had not fainted under all the pressure, she was discerning, she could not bear evil, falsehoods or hypocrisy. What a wonderful church! What a wonderful representation, but the Lord sees a critical flaw in His bride, and it is terminal. It is a flaw that can be terminal. It is a flaw that if it is not corrected will make her unworthy and unacceptable to bear His name. I dare say if you read all the commendable things about Ephesus you would have to say, "They do love the Lord," and they did. However, it was not first love. Somehow it was not that first love, the ultimate love, divine love, the passion of love.

When you look at Laodicea, (which we will look at later) He says you are lukewarm. I will spew you out of my mouth; I cannot stand it. Lukewarm love is not acceptable. These are not my words; these are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. For His bride to be ready there has to be first love, full of first love.

What is this first love? We wrestle with that many times when we consider love. We love the Lord, but is it first love? Has the edge gone on our first love? Do we become a little self-satisfied? In I Corinthians 13 Paul describes some aspects of this first love. He said, "Love suffers long, which apparently they had; they endured. Love is kind, it is not mean; it is giving. Love does not lift itself up, make something of itself. It is not puffed up, thinking they are better than the others. It is not self-importance; it is the importance of others that matters in first love. Love seeks not her own, but love seeks the best for others. It is not self-satisfied. Love is not easily provoked; it thinks no evil, especially of one another. Love rejoices in the truth not in lies. Love of this kind does not fail, it overcomes everything. It is utterly selfless, self-forgetting, it is uncalculating, it is not manipulative of others. It is fierce, fiery, hot love. It is strong and faithful love. These are some of the aspects of first love. The Lord is really speaking to Ephesus about their problem; it is a fatal flaw. You love me, but it is not first love. It is not that hot, fervent love.

What happened to Ephesus? Do you remember in the beginning when the Word of God was preached to them through Paul? They were really into the occult and magic arts. It was not a casual thing to them; they were really into it, and we know how it lets the enemy in. However, when they received the gospel, it made such an impact on them that they brought all of the books they had on the occult and the arts of magic and put them in a pile in the middle of the city and burned them. It was a testimony that they had turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and would no longer practice these things.

Paul was so caught by the love of these people that he remained there for three years. He taught and preached to those people in Ephesus, and actually his ministry went out to all the other locations with the center based in Ephesus. As you read Paul's letter to Ephesus, I am sure that we all realize it is the highest of revelations of the Lord's heart, and what he is after. It is quite clear that his eternal purpose is for Christ to be fully manifested, and that would require a bride. It would require, as it is referred to in Ephesians, the body of Christ, the church, the bride. That is what would fully manifest Him, and when He is fully manifested, it is first love.

It was not intelligence that the Lord responded to. In I Corinthians Paul said, "You are intelligent; you are really smart; you have all the gifts, but you are carnal." But it was not so with

Ephesus; they were full of first love. God could share His heart with them, and that is what He did in the letter to the Ephesians.

But something happened in Ephesus. I would say the blade got dull. If you have a knife that is really sharp and then it becomes dull, it is no longer functional. First love is very discerning and it is very sharp. They had lost that sense of clarity with the Lord. Their appetite was not quite there like it used to be. The fire was smoldering in their hearts. It was there, but it was no longer a hot flaming fire. What has done this to them? It could be that everything had become familiar. We hear these words over the years that many different messages have become familiar, and ones are saying: "Oh, yes, I know all about the eternal purpose of God. Yeah, I know we are the body of Christ, and we need to be built together," but it no longer makes an impact in our hearts. We are so familiar with these things that sometimes we lose that edge. Familiarity often takes away the edge of love for our Lord. It is just not there any longer. Ephesus knew the Word of God and their love rejoiced in the truth. Ephesus had the highest revelation of the Word shared by Paul with them in that letter, but I believe maybe forty years later they were hearing but no longer applying what they heard.

When you first come to the Lord, everything you read is so alive, people talk to you about the Lord and right away it hits your heart. It becomes something alive in you; it does something to you. But after a while, maybe because we have a little bit of armor on, it does not have that impact in our hearts.

First love is hungry love; it is always hungry. It is never quite satisfied. The more it tastes of the Lord's love, the more it wants. That is the way it should be with first love. So first love I would say is hungry love. It is always seeking to apply the things of the Lord to our lives personally.

Maybe we are just settling down; after all it has been forty years, and things are very familiar to us. We are living stones, but we have to be punched every once in a while to get the life to come out. We are all living stones, but we can get in that state where we are self-satisfied. It just becomes too much. "Maybe I won't meet with the brothers and sisters this week; I am okay with the Lord." Being self-satisfied can happen to us. It happens to Jerry Aman, and probably it happens to most of us. However, first love is pursuing love. It never gets self-satisfied; it is always looking for more.

The apostle Paul is the greatest example of this. At the end of his life, at the end of his ministry, what was his passion? He said, "That I might know Him; *that I might know Him.*" That was his passion. With all that he had been through—all the shipwrecks, the beatings, being stoned, imprisoned many times in trying to get the Word of God out to the world. He had not given up nor had he become offended with the Lord. He said, "I was pressed out of measure even to thinking that I might lose my life." But what was important to him at the end of his life? That I might continue to know Him. Is there anyone that you know of that knew the Lord any more than the apostle Paul? He was taken up into the third heaven, and he spent some time in Paradise. Here is a man certainly who knew God, but at the very end this was still his passion. It was a pursuing love, and that is what first love is.

Maybe we lose a little freshness, and we can do that when we drift out of fellowship. You do not make a decision that you are not going to keep up your fellowship with the Lord or have a close relationship with Him. You just kind of drift away from it. Other things begin to consume you in your life, very important things you need to do. But somehow you lose that freshness with the Lord. First love is always fresh. When things begin to become a routine and a formality, be

very concerned that it may be a loss of first love. It is easy to fall into a routine. You do love the Lord, but the passion is just not there, the fire is no longer there. Not so with first love! It is staying fresh by looking to the Lord.

I know places where the saints get into a lethargic position, and then the table seems totally dull. They decided what they needed to do was change things up and maybe people would come alive again. So instead of having the Lord's Table weekly they decided to do it once a month, but that did not achieve what they wanted. They thought by having it fewer times the reality would be there once again; but the change in their method did not work. In fact, finally in many places they only have the Lord's Table at Easter and Christmas which they thought would make it special. It *is* special; it *is* special all the time. We are the problem, and only the Lord's love, first love can lift us up.

First love is passionate; it wants to meet with the Lord. He says that He is in our midst when we have the table together. He said, "I am here; I am in the midst. Speak to me; talk to me." First love is no longer routine; it is not just a formality that you go through. If we feel that way, maybe we need to reexamine our own heart before the Lord. That is what I have been doing in these days. The key is a return to first love.

Smyrna

First love is the issue with all of these churches. That one issue is the all-encompassing thing. Smyrna was suffering; they were under persecution, and the Lord said to them in words of comfort, "Look, you are going to be persecuted for ten days." In other words, the Lord has put a limit on it, but you are going to suffer. Some of you will be thrown into prison and some will be martyred. And His word was: "Be faithful." That is first love—be faithful unto death. That was His word. First love is what will bring us through when we are being persecuted. Otherwise, I think we will become offended with the Lord. We might say, "Well, I have loved the Lord and I have given myself to Him, but all of these terrible persecutions and sufferings are coming upon me." Isn't that what the enemy uses? He says, "The Lord does not love you; if He did He would not let you suffer this way. He would not let you be unjustifiably persecuted. The Lord just does not love you anymore. He is not with you." That is the way the enemy attacks when we are under suffering, but first love is what gets us through. And that is why the Lord said, "Be faithful" to those in Smyrna.

Pergamum and Thyatira

Pergamum and Thyatira are interesting because something has happened in these churches. They were actually worshipping Balaam. They were trying to worship the Lord and worship Balaam and other gods. And we know about other gods that come into our lives. They take away our first love. There were false doctrines, and then there was the woman Jezebel. She wanted to control everything, she wanted to be the center of attention, she wanted everything brought to her and submitted to her. She is actually against the Lord. Things have really fallen in that church.

How did that happen? I think the saints had divided hearts. They loved the Lord, but they loved the world. They loved the things of the world, and these things resulted in another God coming in and taking over their lives. They were being controlled, not by the Holy Spirit but by a person, a human person. Their hearts were divided. They did not have the singleness of the dove's eye. It is just another way of saying they lost first love. First love is discerning love. When you are in first love with the Lord, when you really are having that personal walk with the Lord

and on fire inside with the Lord, it is discerning. When you get into an oppressive atmosphere, you notice it. First love is very discerning. It does not put up with evil; it recognizes it and cannot accept it. It senses false doctrine. You hear something that somebody shares and it is a false doctrine. Do you sense it? You cannot explain it, put your finger on it, but something is not right. First love is discerning love.

Sardis

To the church at Sardis He says, "You have a name, but you are dead." That is quite a proclamation. You have a name that you are a Christian, but you are really dead. In other words, you are not complete. It goes on to say, "You are not perfect; you are not complete." They had the word, but something was missing. What was missing? It was first love. They held the truth but they did not hold the truth with love. The Lord says, "The letter kills, but the Spirit is life." When there is first love, it is Spirit and it gives life, but when the love is not there, it is not the Spirit, and what you get is the letter in your heart. It just kills you, and does not help you; it condemns you.

In the Corinthian Church, they had the word. They were smart, and they knew it, but the Lord said that they were carnal. They were not spiritual, and first love was the issue. They had become proud of their gift they had from the Lord and wanted to display it rather than it be a part of what the Lord was doing. They were self-promoting because first love was missing.

Paul is very clear in I Corinthians 13: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not love, I have become as sounding brass." In other words, you express, but what you are expressing is without life; it is dead. "And though I have the gift of prophesy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have all faith that I can move mountains, but have not love I am nothing." Wow! What is Paul telling them? If you are not exercising your gift in love, if you are not loving your brothers and sisters, you are nothing. All that you do is nothing. The Lord has been very clear. He says in His Word that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul. We are to love the brethren, and we are to love our neighbor. Everything is love.

Philadelphia

He had nothing bad to say about Philadelphia, so what did they have? Philadelphia means "brotherly love." Isn't that amazing! This is what pleased the Lord. He had no rebuke for them. What is brotherly love? I am talking about divine brotherly love. It is a manifestation of the love of Christ in your heart for your brothers and sisters. That is brotherly love. It is the manifestation of the love of God that is in your heart for your brothers and sisters. It manifests that first love. That is why the Lord was so pleased with Philadelphia; it was unfeigned love. I Peter speaks of: "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren." (I Peter 1:22). What is unfeigned love? It is not pretend love; it is not giving a false appearance of love. It is pure love; it is truly sincere love. That is unfeigned love. They did not look down upon one another. They did not just love the ones that agreed with them or had the same thoughts and opinions. They did not just love the ones that they liked. They loved everyone, even the ones they may have had difficulties with in the assembly. They loved one another. They did not love in order to be loved back. That is one of our human flaws, isn't it? We only love if the ones we show our love to loves us back.

Paul was very clear with the Corinthians. They despised Paul; they did not recognize him as a true apostle. They said that the other eleven or twelve, Judas the exception, were with the Lord

for three and one half years. They were true apostles; you are a false apostle; you made yourself an apostle. We know that the Lord made him an apostle on the Damascus road, but they did not; they despised Paul, not the whole church but many of them, and this was Paul's word to them: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" II Corinthians 12:15). That is pure love. Full of love, first love.

It is interesting in Philadelphia that even though He had no rebuke for them, He called them to overcome. "You need to overcome." Now what is it they must overcome? Right before He says overcome, He says, "Holds fast that which you have." What did they have? They had first love. They had love for one another, and they were to maintain it. Satan will attack it and try to separate us, give us different opinions, divide us, and put thoughts in our minds: "I do not think this brother or sister really likes you." It is totally false most of the time. His attack is to put imaginations in our heart to try and divide us. But praise the Lord, with first love we see through his accusations and his implications.

Laodicea

He said to them: "You are neither cold nor hot; you are lukewarm. I hate lukewarm. I cannot stand lukewarm. If I put lukewarm water in my mouth I am going to spew it out. I want it to be hot and fervent love, not lukewarm love. It has to be hot. I had rather you be cold than lukewarm because if you are cold maybe I can wake you up. But when you are lukewarm, you are self-satisfied. But He is saying to us, brothers and sisters, that lukewarm love is unacceptable and it is contemptible in His eyes; I will spew you out of my mouth. It has to be first love in His future bride.

How do you come to first love? You realize that you cannot work this up nor can you generate this love. What do I do? How can I have this first love? I cannot work it up. All my striving to pump myself up does not work. Lord, you are going to have to draw me. Remember in the Song of Songs the maiden realized she was out of that intimate relationship with the Lord, and she said, "Lord, draw me, and I will run after you." It was a drawing of the Lord. It is the love of the Lord that constrains us.

Neither can we be passive and just say, "I will wait until I just get flooded with the love of the Lord, and then I will have it. No, you have to come into an active participation with the Lord Himself, with the Lord's will. Lord, this is Your will. You would not have me be lukewarm. You want me to be fervent in my love for You and my brothers and sisters and unbelievers. This is what You are after, Lord. I want to stand on Your side so that You will have it.

It is interesting that in John 17:26 the Lord was praying to the Father and the disciples were there. He said, "Father, that the love wherein You have loved me may be in them and I in them." That is the Lord's heart right before He went to the cross. He said, "That the love that we have together might be in them and that I might be in them." Do you realize that the Lord's prayer was answered?

Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts." That is a fact. The Lord has poured out into our hearts His love; it is there. It may be weak; it may be muted, it may just be embers, but once a fire gets down to embers all you have to do is stoke it and it flames up. We need flaming love for the Lord Jesus. But He says, "It has been shed abroad in your heart."

So my purpose in sharing this message is not to condemn anybody. My heart is that this assembly would come together and actively seek the Lord Jesus that we might be full of this first love, that we might say, "Lord, baptize me into this first love. Bring that first love to fruition. May

that first love that you shed abroad in my heart come to life and so fill me that it is flowing over—overflowing love. That is your will; that is what You want.”

The loss of first love as we can see is so critical; it is a deadly flaw, and we need first love. But we lose that edge; we become a little self-satisfied, which is easy to do. And the picture that came to my heart is what I experienced with my heart attack. My heart had been checked out four or five years ago and everything was fine, but since then something happened and I did not realize it was going on. Slowly plaque began to build up in the main heart artery that supplies blood to the heart. I did not know plaque was building up. I felt fine; I was doing okay. Everything was fine, but on October 12th it happened. All of a sudden my heart began to shut down; the blockage was 100 per cent. My heart was pumping and trying to get that blood through and the force against my heart became so great that my heart began to fail, and it was damaged. But praise the Lord, I recognized that I was having a heart attack and I took three aspirin. We got the rescue squad, went to the doctor, and he was able to break up that blockage. Praise the Lord for that.

Then I thought, the Lord has granted me a second chance. What is important? What matters, Lord? Thus, I have been brought to this matter of first love. It did not just end with my artery being unblocked and the blood flowing again. My heart was damaged and is still damaged. It is not pumping efficiently as it was before. So I just could not go on with my life and say, “Okay, the blockage is gone and I am good, so I can just resume my life as I had before. I think most of you can tell the difference by just looking at me because I lost about fifteen pounds. I had to get some pressure off my heart, so I had to lose weight. I love salt; I love nothing better than a fresh tomato with salt on it. I love it. It is like ice cream to most people. But I cannot eat that salt anymore because it holds fluid, and fluid causes pressure and damages the heart. I have had to go to what they call cardiac rehab, exercising twice a week. I walk the other four days to try and strengthen my heart even though the doctor does not think I can get it back to full function.

The point I am making is with this matter of first love you just cannot say one day, “Lord, I hope I am full of it.” We have to actively pursue first love, and to me that means actively pursuing the Lord. You cannot just be passive. I would hope that all of us would pray, “Lord, bring me to first love. I do know if I have it or not, but fill my heart with love.

Lord, as we have been before You today, I have no desire to condemn anybody, but just to bring to light the condition we may be in. Lord, we want to actively pursue first love, our Lord Jesus Christ, that His love may be fully expressed in us. Lord, we do not want just a lukewarm love, but passionate for Thee, passionate for one another, passionate to see that your bride is made ready. Lord, I just believe that first love is what is going to draw You back when You can say, “Oh, I cannot wait any longer. I am full of first love and My bride is full of first love, and I need to go and get My bride. I think that is on Your heart in these days. So Lord, I just lift this up before You. May You speak to each heart today. We ask that You bless us, continue to keep us by Your grace and love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.