

Tak Ng--First Love and First Works

Let's pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, we give thanks to You, we are so blessed, Lord. You have kept us together at the Lord's table to commune with You. We worship You. As I come, I want to share Your Word. Lord, I just feel who is adequate to share the Word of God? None of us can, but indeed it is only through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So, Lord, we do want to pray for this hour. May there be Your presence as well as the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be with us in the speaking and in the hearing. Lord, I do believe there is something in fellowship, in the sharing that is dear to Your heart. So, we want to commit ourselves back to You, Lord. This is Your hour; You speak as You please. We do thank You in these last days, You still have words for Your people; Lord, that is Your mercy, and we thank You. And we pray in the name of our Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have many Bible verses, but I will only read two. I think you already know these verses, so when I read them, they should come up in your heart.

Revelation 2:4-5a are the words in the middle of the letter that the Lord wrote to the church in Ephesus.

"But I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

So, the focus on these two verses is first love and first works.

In Acts 2:42 many brothers have shared this before, and it refers to the early church after Peter preached and 3,000 were saved. What did it look like? What was their daily life?

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

What is in my heart is at the end of the gospel of Matthew when the disciples asked the question: "What are the signs of the end of age?" (Matthew 24:3-13).

We all know the times that we are in by just looking at the wars, the famines, the hurricanes, the fires, the earthquakes, and erupting of volcanos. The times that we are living in are in such a time as what the Lord told His disciples. So often we say that the Lord's return is imminent, and that is a true statement. And Brother Kaung often encouraged us to be ready because the Lord can return at any moment of time. It is really in my heart today to say: "Yes, the Lord is returning, and He is coming soon, so be ready."

I asked the Lord: "What would be that one thing we must have in His church before He can close out this age and bring in the kingdom age?" I am convinced in my heart that His church must have first love." Now the words "first love" only occurs once in the Bible, in Revelation 2:4. That is not a definition for it, but by sending those seven letters in Revelation chapters 2-3, the

Lord shows us what is first love. He spoke as the first person to those churches, and He shows us the nature of first love, and that is important. So, I will share what the nature of first love is, and for that we must go back to history.

Of course, the first letter is to the church in Ephesus. We want to see from the history of the church in Ephesus this matter of first love and what happened. Because the Lord said, "I have this against you; you have left the first love." And we want to get some idea on the time between when they were in the way of first love and several years later when they left first love was not a long period of time. We talk about several years, and there are lessons to be learned there. So that is the second thing.

In Revelation 2:5 the Lord said, "Remember therefore where thou has fallen, (remember that) and repent and do the first works." So, as we return to first love, and the Lord said, "Do the first works."

In Revelation 2:5, how can we qualify what the first works are? So, I chose the verse from Acts 2:42 to see what the early church in Jerusalem did. Can we learn from this verse that will impress our hearts regarding first works? Then this question has come to my heart: "Are we like the church in Laodicea?" Declension had set in, and indeed the church had left its first love and was not doing the first works. If we do end on that note, we will all be really depressed and will despair. But that is not the Lord's way. Recently a book by Brother Kaung has been published: "Glory," as seen in the book of Ezekiel." If we have not read that yet, it will be encouragement for our time. I will share some thoughts from that, and then I will give the summary at the end.

First, I need to give some background, and we will notice, if we have a Red-Letter Bible, it will be easy to spot what the Lord said personally because it is in red letters. At the end of the Bible, the last chapter in Revelation 22:20, the Lord said, "I am coming quickly." They are the last words in the Bible of what the Lord said personally. The Lord said that three times in the same chapter in verses 7, 12, 20. So we know that the Lord's heart desire is to return; He is coming quickly. He said that 2,000 years ago, but He is coming quickly for a reason. It should be clear to us that His desire to come is to receive His bride, the church.

Sometimes we use the term, "The Lord is coming," and we know that the word for that is "Parousia." It is not a single event at a time; it is a sequence of events or multiple events in a period. So, in the book of Revelation, we can see that the Lord Himself told us many instances of different events, whether He talks about the opening of the seven seals, the dragon, and many other things. It might distract us, but what is the main thing in there? There is one verse in there that really tells us the main thing. What is the main event in those times when we refer to Parousia? It is in Revelation 19:7b: "For the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Now we might see many things happening in this world. Indeed, the Lord is coming, but only at that point when the wife of the Bridegroom makes herself ready, then that means the closing

of this age. I think that is very important because when we see all the events taking place in the world, we do not know how long it is going to be before the end of this age. But when the bride has made herself ready, we know the next thing is the thousand-year wedding feast or the thousand-year kingdom. So that is important.

So, we would ask the question: What does it mean by “His bride has made herself ready?” What is in the Lord’s heart when He said this? I think it is very clear that Ephesians 5:27 gives us a glimpse of the character of the church in the heart of the Lord Jesus.

“That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle of any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

In Revelation His bride has made herself ready, and Ephesians 5:27 is the condition of the church that must be for the Lord to close out this age.

Sometimes when we think about the return of the Lord, there is nothing much we can do about it because the timing is in the Father’s hand. For the Father, the timing is always in terms of the fulness of time. In Revelation 19:7, His bride has made herself ready.

And also, we have a word from Peter in II Peter 3:11b and 12a which refers to the end. “What sort of people are you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord?”

Well, you say, “There is nothing we can do.” Here is the word from Peter, that it depends on how we live, it depends on His bride being made ready that we can hasten His coming. Or we can look at it the other way around; we can delay His coming. So even though everything is in the Father’s hand, some things depend on us. As Kenny shared last time, it depends on our response. It is all grace, but it depends on our response.

Now 2,000 years have passed since the Lord spoke the words of Revelation to John on the Island of Patmos. In chapter 22 the Lord said, “I am coming quickly.” So, we must ask the question today: “Does the church answer to the Lord’s heart today? Does the character of the church today corresponds to the character of the Lord Himself? Is the return of the Lord Jesus delayed because of the unreadiness of the church? That is a very serious question. But even if man is unfaithful, the Lord Himself is always faithful. It is so amazing when we read those seven letters in Revelation 2-3. We can say that those seven personal love letters were written to those seven local churches, but they were not written to them only, they are also love letters to us. Those letters are in red letters, as Jesus was speaking in first person. The next time you find Scripture in red letters is in Revelation 16:15:

(“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked, and men will not see his shame.”)

Now this red letter is only in two translations, the American Standard Version and Darby, and it is in parenthesis. I do not know whether John recorded what the Lord said at that time or John

recalled something the Lord said before, and the Holy Spirit inserted it in that context. But the next time you see the red letters is when the Lord Himself spoke of eternity.

So, the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 are really the last spoken words to the churches, and we have to pay attention to that. When you look at those seven letters, the first one is to the church in Ephesus. When you read that letter in chapter 2, what stands out? As I mentioned before, it is first love. Now for those seven letters there are different interpretations which we will not go into today. Yet if the Lord is speaking to His church and He is talking about first love in the first letter, would He not show us the nature of first love in the other six letters? Can we take the letters as independent from others? We must take all seven letters together.

I will share something from Brother Sparks' book called "His Great Love." If you have not read that book, please read it. I think there is a lot of encouragement in it. He shared a message on these seven letters, and he said, "For years I could not think of one word that gave me the key to these seven letters." He did not seem to find it until one time he said, "First love, and the other six letters spoke of the nature of first love."

What is First Love?

Again, what is first love? We often use the word "love." I mentioned that first love is only mentioned once in the Bible. What is first love? The word "first" means "the earliest." I think we can say, "Yeah, that is the meaning of first, that is how we use it, but the Bible also uses first to mean something more than earliest. We know that in Romans 8:29 it says, "The Lord Jesus, the first born among many brethren." So, the implication there is that He is not only the first one born, but it means that everyone who comes after Him will be destined to become conformed to His image and His likeness. That is what firstborn means.

Then in I Corinthians 15:20 when it talks about resurrection, Christ is the first fruits of those who are asleep. Now does this only mean that He is the first One that was raised up from the dead? Yes, but it also speaks of us. It also implies that all those who believe in Him will be raised from the dead. So, I think we should see that, but we need to see also that first love is more than the love we have in the beginning. So that is important.

Now in those seven letters, we know that in the letter to Smyrna and the letter to Philadelphia the Lord did not tell them to repent. Brother Sparks looked at the letters, and he said, "What do those letters mean? They show us the love they had, and that is important.

In the other five letters the Lord said "Repent." There was something they were lacking. They were lacking in terms of love. Based on these letters Brother Sparks shared with us on this matter of the nature of first love. I am going to paraphrase what Brother Sparks shared. I need to do that because sometimes he shares something so high it is hard to grasp.

Suffering Love

The church in Smyrna was a suffering church. I think that might be straight forward to you to know because in that church for the sake of the Lord Himself there was tribulations, poverty, accusations from religious men, imprisonments. However, they remained faithful unto death (Revelation 2:9-10.) So, we can see that the church was suffering. And we also see that suffering love is a whole heart devotion to the Lord Jesus. And who are prepared to go through anything for the Lord, even suffering and persecution? It does not matter what people say, love is stronger than all hindrances. So, first love is suffering love.

Discerning Love

The church in Pergamos had false teachings. There was the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast snares upon the sons of Israel, to eat idol sacrifices, acts of immoral life, and the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The church people believed that there was to be separation between the clergy and the common people, special class and second class. All of these were false teachings, and they came inside the church. They could not discern what was of the Lord and what was not of the Lord. They could not discern the things that differed. So, what were they lacking? Discernment. So, Brother Sparks said, "It shows us that first love is discerning love, able to tell the difference." We may say that love is blind. Love is not blind. If you are consumed with a burning love for the Lord Jesus, you will be quick to sense what is doubtful and questionable. We will know if we are in first love because we have that discernment, and we know what teaching is of the Lord and what is not. So, first love is discerning love.

Uncompromising Love

The church in Thyatira was somewhat worse than Pergamos. Not only had false teaching gotten in, but they had the woman, Jezebel. In that time, Jezebel led the Israelites to worship Baal, idol worship. Now it was not only false teaching in the church, but they were worshipping idols in the church. So, the church was compromised. In first love there is no compromise; there cannot be any compromise. There is no compromise between idols and God, between self and spirit, between the world and Christ. So, first love is uncompromising love—no mixture, no compromise.

Distinguishing Love

The church in Sardis was in bad condition. When you read about them, they thought they were alive to the Lord Jesus, but it was in name only. The Lord said that they were dead (Revelation 3:1).

The Lord Jesus had not found in these ones their work to be perfect in the sight of God (Revelation 3:2). So, in that condition they were not standing for the Lord, and they were not standing for what was of the Lord. There was nothing definite about them. They were not standing out as Christians, as believers; they did not have this one motive in their heart, one

thought, one intensity. It is like Jello. The love that they were lacking was distinguishing love. So, first love is distinguishing love.

Steadfast Love

In the church in Philadelphia, the Lord said in Revelation 3:10 that they kept the word of His perseverance. And perseverance can be translated to steadfast, remains, nothing changed. So, we can see that steadfast love means we go on. Whatever we encounter, whatever we suffer, we can go on and endure steadfastly. So, first love is steadfast love.

Fervent Love

To the church in Laodicea the Lord said, "You are neither hot nor cold; you are lukewarm." The worse part there is that the Lord said, "I am outside. Not only I am outside, but I am also outside of My own house." Can you imagine that! The Lord was outside of His own house and knocking? So even though the believers were Christians, you cannot say anything good about them. They were just very ordinary; everything had become a routine. The church in Laodicea was characterized by its lukewarmness. The opposite of lukewarmness is fire, fervent. So, first love is fervent love.

Brother Sparks shared in his book: "First love is all inclusive in nature." All these six aspects are included in first love. All you can say about first love is that it is selfless, self-forgetting, uncalculated, it is fiery, it is hot, it is strong, it is faithful. If I have not made this clear, please read Brother Sparks' book because it is very important for us to know what first love means.

First love is suffering love, discerning love, uncompromising love, distinguishing love, steadfast love, and fervent love. As I have mentioned, before the Lord returns, before the closing of this age, what would the Lord have in His church? The Lord must have in His church this all-inclusive love, love in all features, the first love.

The Early Years in the Ephesian Church

I want to share a little about the early years of the church in Ephesus. We have all read the letter to the Ephesians. Their spiritual understanding came out of their spiritual maturity, and what they did in those earlier years. They loved the Lord; they showed first love in those early years, and then something happened, and they departed from the way of first love.

Revelation 2:4: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

That would mean they had their first love at some point in time. Otherwise, they could not have left their first love. Paul's second mission journey was in AD 52, roughly. I looked up the dates on the internet, so I hope the dates are correct. Paul went to Ephesus, and it was his custom to go to the synagogue and to reason with the Jews. So this was the first time that Paul was in Ephesus, and then he went back to Ephesus on his third missionary journey in AD 54-56. Now this

time he spent much more time there, over two years. And he was reasoning and persuading people in Ephesus about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8-10).

I want to describe something that touched my heart, and it is how the believers in Ephesus showed their first love. At that time the people in the city of Ephesus practiced magic. You might say, "What is the big deal about magic?" Sometimes we think magic is like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. The hands are faster than the eyes, so you think that is magic. But it was not this kind of magic in the city of Ephesus. Back then magic involved with demons, evil spirits, the underworld. And it is also interesting to know that Ephesus had the great temple of Artemis (Acts 19:35). That was magic and mythology; they all went hand in hand. The people believed in magic powers, magic items, and even magic words. So magic was the way of life in Ephesus, and people made a whole lot of money in the practice of magic.

Paul spent two years there, and many were saved. They publicly confessed that what they were doing was evil deeds and magic. They disclosed their magic publicly, and it lost its power. So, they formerly made profits from casting magic spells and magic words on people. When magic spells and words were disclosed, it rendered them ineffective. They gave up on magic spells and magic words. More than that, they gathered their magic books together and burned them publicly (Acts 19:18-19). Those magic books were worth a lot of money, 50,000 pieces of silver. Roughly, one piece of silver would be the wage of one day of labor; that would be the wages of 50,000 days of labor.

So, they believed in the Lord at that time, and because they were saved, they loved the Lord. They had first love, so they no longer cared for the things of the world, and they gave up magic. They gave up the magic books they had, and they had a total break from the former way of life and from others in the city. There was no turning back as far as they were concerned.

A little bit later, while Paul was there, there was a riot, and he had to leave the city and go to Macedonia. Paul loved the church in Ephesus, and he spent two or three years there. The Bible says that he was there day and night admonishing each one with tears. That is how much Paul loved the believers in Ephesus. It also mentioned that Paul was able to declare the whole purpose of God to the church there (Acts 20:27). Think about that! Paul could not share that with the church at Corinth because they were yet spiritual babies. That means to me that the hearts of the believers in Ephesus were so tender to the Lord that Paul could open his heart and his understanding to them. They had first love.

Of course, in the Bible we know about Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Some believe that was written during the first imprisonment of Paul in Rome, AD 60-62. This was about five years after Paul said farewell to the elders of the church at Miletus when he was on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38). I think we all have read the letter to the Ephesians. "The Eternal Purpose of God" has its only occurrence in this book. Then you find the mystery of Christ in the church (Ephesian 3:4), the mystery of the gospel (Ephesian 6:19), and the mystery of God's will (Ephesian 1:9). Some people say that Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the high-water mark of the New Testament.

It was written to the believers in Ephesus, who had such a heart, and they were able to take all this in. They had their first love to the Lord Himself. So, this was the evidence that they once had first love.

A Great House

Then we have the question: what happened? Something happened, and we do not know exactly what happened. But we do have the words from the Bible. Later, Timothy was serving the Lord in Ephesus. When Paul wrote his last letter, II Timothy, two things caught my attention. Paul wrote this letter 1 to 3 years after he wrote the letter to the Ephesians.

In II Timothy 2:20 he said, “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and earthenware; and some to honor, and some to dishonor.”

The house of God is meant to be a great house, and Paul used the words “in a large house.” A great house had become a large house. What did the Lord find there? There were wooden and earthen vessels, and gold and silver vessels. The wooden and earthen vessels were earthly, dishonored vessels. On the other side, there were gold and silver vessels which were heavenly and honorable. So, at that time there was found this mixture in the church in Ephesus. It was not too long, maybe 1-3 years, after Paul had written the letter to the Ephesians and declension had set in.

One of the natures of first love is discernment. First love is discerning love. They were lacking discerning love, and they could not tell the difference between what was heavenly and what was earthly.

Furthermore, in the second letter to Timothy chapter 3:5a: “holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power.” They became religious, which means they had the form and not the spiritual reality. They were lacking distinguishing love. In describing the history of the church at Ephesus we can see that this matter of drifting away from first love was so quick, and it only took 1-3 years. It must have grieved the Lord’s heart very much. This was a serious matter that they had left their first love.

Remember from where you have fallen

The church in Ephesus came so far in spiritual understanding, yet they went astray in such a short time. May we have a tender heart towards the Lord and be quick to respond to His corrections. Thank the Lord in His great mercy, the Lord did not stop there, He had not given up on the church in Ephesus. He called them to remember, to repent, and to do the first works (Revelation 2:5a). “Remember from where you have fallen.” That is important. Sometimes we say, “We repent.” And then we want to go on, but that is not the case here. I think we all have experienced, before the age of GPS, driving down the road, making a wrong turn and ending up in nowhere. How do we get back? We must figure out where we took the wrong turn, go back to that point and continue. That is the remembering.

Repent

That is also true in repentance. So, remember from where you have fallen and repent. Repentance is not just saying we are sorry or being remorseful or being sad and regretting something wrong that we have done. It is more than that. 'Repent' is an action word. It must be translated to some immediate action. I think in the Wuest Translation it says, "At once have a change of mind." It is a matter of realization of going down the wrong path, stopping and making a 180-degree turn. That is repentance. As I mentioned before, this is a matter of returning to where you drifted off. Sometimes I think that is difficult for many of us, for me, because the Lord said, "remember and repent and return." At the place where we have a broken relationship with the Lord Himself, maybe we are not living the life of first love or maybe we are not loving one another with first love, we must go back to the place where we have offended one another, the place where we offended the Lord Himself. At that place reconcile with the Lord Jesus and with one another because of the love of God. Reconciliation is so important in our lives. I do not think we are doing enough of that.

Do the First Works

Then the Lord said, "Do the first works." You know, in the letter to the church in Ephesus in the book of Revelation, the Lord mentioned many works that they did. The Lord even commended them for what they did. Yet the Lord said, "That is not from first love." So, we see the sequence here. Unless we return to first love, first works are the works out of first love. It is not just work; it is works out of first love. Without first love there would be no first works.

So, we come down to what is first works. Again, you cannot find a definition of first works in the Bible. The only occurrence of the first works is in Revelation 2:5. But we can have a glimpse of what first works are by looking at the life of the believers in the early church in Jerusalem in Acts 2. I want to go back to the word that Kenny shared the other time, "What is work?" What is the work of God? I think sometimes we have this thought that we must do something. Really the question the Jews asked in John chapter 6: "What shall we do so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered: "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent." So, what is doing the work of God? Believe in Him. Everything must come out from that. It is not like we go and do the work; it is about believing in Him, and it is about being in first love.

Acts 2:42: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Now pay attention to the word "they". It was not just the 120 in the upper room; it was the 120 plus the 3,000. It was not only the ones who had a long experience with the Lord; it included the recently saved, and 3,000 were also there. There were 3,120 believers, and they were together. They were together because of the sense of first love in them.

Then we have the word "continually." That would mean this was unceasing. We need to love this. When we are in first love, time does not matter that much. Time is no longer any concern.

“They were continually devoting themselves.” Devoting means giving your all, whether in time or resources. Again, when we are in first love, we will give our all to the Lord Jesus.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching. Of course, we know that the apostles’ teaching was the teaching of the Lord Himself. It was the Word of God. So, what did they do in those early days? They were in first love; they wanted to know more of the Lord Himself, and they shared with each other the Word of God, teaching each other. They also shared the Word of God with the people in the city of Jerusalem. I do not think the teaching was limited to the apostles or the 120 who knew the Lord; it also included the young believers, the new believers, who were in His Word.

Then they were continually devoting themselves to fellowship. Fellowship means sharing something in common, and they sensed that. 3,120 believers had something in common, and that was the Lord’s life in them. So naturally when you have something in common, you are in fellowship, and you seek out one another to maintain that fellowship. Also, in fellowship they encouraged one another, they edified one another, and they built up one another.

They were continually devoting themselves to the breaking of bread. They loved the Lord; they remembered the Lord, and they broke bread together daily to remember the Lord. Also, when they broke bread, they came to the table which was communion. So, it was precious to the Lord Himself, and it was also very precious to the Father—table communion.

Then lastly it says, “Continually devoting themselves to prayers. Prayer is important. Prayer is inquiring of the heart of the Father in heaven. Through prayer His will be done on earth as is in heaven. So, engaging in prayer really means they were engaging in the business of the heavenly Father.

So those four things were so vital, so living in those early days in Jerusalem with those 3,120 believers. This was the first works out of their first love. We must ask: “How about today?” We cannot live in the past. So, what is the condition of the church today? We must ask that question. I mentioned teaching of the Lord, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. I have to say they are very neglected. Even the teaching of the Lord Jesus, the Word of God is neglected in many churches. That is today’s condition. So, we must ask, “Has the church left her first love?” The Lord knew the church in Ephesus had left their first love, but we must know ourselves: has the church left her first love?

As I mentioned before, many say that we are in the state of the church in Laodicea. The Lord Jesus is outside His own house. That is far away from the church that is in first love. It is very far away from what the church ought to be. In Ephesians 5:27a: “That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless.”

When you think about it, should we despair? Would we say, “Will His bride ever be ready for the Lord’s return?”

I want to mention Brother Kaung's book on "Glory: as seen by Ezekiel". Ezekiel was a priest and had been trained to be a priest. He was exiled to Babylon, hopeless. In those conditions God came in and showed him visions of the glory of the Lord, and His glory endures forever. No matter what he saw of the condition of the people of God, God gave him those visions to show him he must turn his eyes and look at God Himself and the glory of God, which endures forever. Even though man's condition is so degraded, yet the purpose of God cannot be undermined. God showed in the visions to Ezekiel all the abominations of the leaders, the priests, the people and the nation that occurred at the temple, and they no longer answered God's heart, and what God must do was to withdraw His glory that had been in the temple. The glory of God left the temple and the city of Jerusalem very reluctantly, and soon after that the temple and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed physically. Brother Kaung said, "If God had allowed them to stand, they would have been the false representation of God on earth." That is a very true statement.

So, fourteen years passed, and we may think that God was not doing anything, but He was working in the heart of the exiles. He was bringing that repentance even behind the peoples' eyes. They were not aware of it, but He was working on the heart of the people. So, fourteen years later after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, God showed Ezekiel another vision of the house of God. It was not only the vision of the house of God, but it was also the return of glory to the house of God. Ezekiel was brought back to a high mountain, the house of God was like a city, enormous (Brother Kaung's words). The enormous house of God was like a city built upon the top of a mountain and it cannot be hidden. Now we know that the pattern of this house was very different from the tabernacle built by Moses. It was different from the temple built by Solomon, it was different from the temple built by the returning exiles, and it was also different from the temple at the time of Jesus. We have not seen this temple yet on earth.

In this matter of the house of God, if we look especially from inside out of the tabernacle built by Moses, the glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies. But in this temple, there is no division between the Holy of Holies and the holy place. The glory of God shines throughout the whole inside of the house. In the Holy of Holies there is the glory of God, in the Holy place there is the glory of God. Even outside in terms of the inner court and the outer court and throughout there is the glory of God. We get to see this vision. Even though today we see that the church may be at the state of Laodicea, God is working behind the scenes, and He is going to have His bride. The Lord is going to make His bride ready for His return.

One thing I want to mention specifically is that in the Holy of Holies, and the Holy place there is only one piece of furniture. It is different from the tabernacle and the temple (Ezekiel 41:22). It is a table and it is also an altar. But it is one piece of furniture, *a table of altar*. We already mentioned the breaking of bread, the table means communion with the Father in heaven. We know what the altar means; it is the altar of incense which is prayers. So, we can see in the heart of the Lord for His house. He wants the people to serve Him in such a way of communing with God as well as prayers. On the outside there is the brass altar, the inner court and outer court,

and there we serve one another. So that is the house of God shown to Ezekiel, and that is the vision we need to see.

I want to sum all this up. In what was shared today we must know that the Lord is coming quickly. He said, "I come quickly." Now we do not want to miss the words. We also mentioned that the bride is making herself ready. We cannot just know the letters of words; we must know what that means.

Ephesians 5 shows us the church, the bride of the Lord. What are her characters? What are the natures of the bride of the Lord? We also shared this matter of first love. It is so important in God's heart. And the Lord, in His last personal letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3, shew us the natures of the first love. It is suffering love, discerning love, uncompromising love, distinguishing love, steadfast love and fervent love.

What Satisfies the Heart of God?

As we get closer to the return of the Lord, the Lord Himself cannot be satisfied with anything less. We can be satisfied with something less, but He cannot. The only thing that satisfies His heart is first love. Nothing less! So, the question would be: "Is everything prompted by first love or do we do that because we live under a sense of duty or obligations, necessities or some other motive, other interests?" Everything, to satisfy the Lord, must be of first love.

I shared the history of the church in Ephesus, and they had a glorious beginning, but in just a few years they went astray. That should be a lesson for us. I shared the first works and what did that entail in the early church. Everyone was involved, all the believers, not just a few that were with the Lord for a long time. Everyone who was in first love was what they could do in first works. It was this matter of the Word of God, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers—the four things. There is so much lacking today that needs to be recovered.

I shared the visions of Ezekiel that was mentioned from Brother Kaung's book. Are we despairing of our own condition and the condition of His church? The Word of the Lord to the church at Laodicea is: "You really cannot see, but you think you are rich, you think you can see, but you do not know your condition. You can buy from Me eye medicines to anoint your eyes so you may see." We need to see; we need to see the visions. We need to buy that medicine from the Lord Himself. Today, He is readying His church for His return. Have we seen that we have left the first love? May the Lord examine our hearts as an individual or as an assembly together. We find that we are no longer in the way of first love. Remember the word to the church in Ephesus. Let's remember where we left our first love and repent and let us return to the way of first love and do the first works. Are we doing the first works? Do we minister to God in communion and prayers? Do we minister to one another in words of God and fellowship? Do we minister Christ to the people of this world? If we find that we are not in first works, we should humble ourselves, ask the Lord to bring us back to first love, and adjust our lives so that we can be doing the first works.

Lastly, the seven love letters to the churches all ended up with this phrase: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” all seven times. And I want to end the sharing today with the title of a hymn that we sang last time: “There is a whisper from the glory of the coming of the Lord.” It is a whisper, so it is not loud, but still, it is a whisper from the glory of the coming of the Lord. There is much hope as there are more and more brothers and sisters who hear the whisper, and their hearts are captured. They repent, they return to their first love, and they do the first works. Have we heard the whisper from the glory of the coming of the Lord?

Let’s pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to thank You for this hour. I confess I am just an unprofitable servant. We do pray on this matter of first love and first works. We bring all this back to You. We ask You, Lord, to anoint it. Lord, speak to each one of us. I do trust, I am convinced that is what You are after in the time we are in before the end of this age. Lord, I do want to pray, even though we see signs of brothers and sisters that are waking up to this matter of first love, to return to the first love and to the first works. We pray for the church, we pray for the brothers and sisters. Lord, take hold of us, touch our hearts. Help us to sense the first love You had upon Your church so that we can also respond with the first love from You, so that we can also do the first works. We ask You, Lord, to have mercy on our condition. But we do trust You that You told Peter that You are building Your church, and the power of Hades would not overcome it. Nothing! Nothing can undermine Your purpose. Lord, the day shall come, the bride shall make herself ready, that You will bring this age to the end, that will be the thousand-year wedding feast, the thousand-year kingdom age. Lord, we look forward to that. Give us an ear. Truly it is only a whisper of the glory of the coming of the Lord. Give everyone an ear to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. So, we bring all this back to You, Lord. It is Your work; may You do such work among Your people today. We want to hear, we want to know our condition, we want to return to the first love and do the first works. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.