

## ***Session 9 Jesus' Primary Message to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2-3)***

### **I. THE CALL TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART**

*This is session 9, and for the IHOPU students this is their final session for this class. However, for those who come Friday nights and our interns, I am going to continue on the book of Revelation and the seven churches for the next number of weeks and through July as there is so much gold to mine in these three chapters. I think of these three chapters—Revelation 1, 2, and 3—as one unit. It is one of the most significant passages in the word of God. It is Jesus revealing Himself in His glory: eyes like burning fire, face like the sun.*

*And then it is Jesus describing what He wants in the Church. He was obviously talking to the Church of that day, but He was talking to the Church in the context of experiencing the Book of Revelation and of His end-time leadership plan to purify the Church and transition the earth to the age to come. The book of Revelation is His plan. He is going to reveal His glory and purify His Church in that plan. And so when He is talking to these seven churches, He surely is talking to them, but He is talking to a billion believers at the end of the age saying in context to this fiery time in history, this challenging time, this great outpouring of the Spirit. "Body of Christ, you must know these things about Me. You must know what I want in the Church."*

*So you do not want to just run through the seven churches and be done with those three chapters. We have given a little bit on each one of the seven churches, and in the weeks to come I am going to compare the churches and how He revealed Himself and put all of those descriptions together, the eternal rewards, the warnings, and the affirmations. We are going to look at them quite a bit more in depth, and we are going to put them all together from all seven churches over the weeks to come.*

*So we are going to begin tonight by seeing the primary message to the seven churches, and that is to love God with all of their heart. We say, "Well, that seems pretty obvious," but I think the message is that the Holy Spirit is going to establish the first commandment in first place. That message is not on the minds of hundreds of millions of believers. Though it seems self-evident and obvious that it is number one on God's agenda, but it is probably on the back-end of the top ten in the Church. It is not on most people's minds, and I do not want to ever just run past this subject because I do not think we can repeat it or say it too many times to remind the Body of Christ and call our own hearts to it.*

*Tonight I want to give a snapshot of the fact that He is calling the Church to the first commandment and how He called three of the seven churches to this in a very specific way. He was really saying this: "Make the first commandment first. Take time to connect your heart to Me. Do not be so busy, even in the revival ministry, and forget Me." That is what He is saying to three of the churches, and that is what He is telling the end-time Church. I have no question that the one church of the seven churches that globally describes the Body of Christ in the earth now is the Laodicean church, not just in the Western world but in the earth. The great miracle of the end times is that the Holy Spirit is going to transform the Laodicean church of this hour into the prepared Bride.*

*What is going to happen in order to have a billion people, not all described by Laodicea but the majority, what is going to happen that makes that kind of transformation in one generation? Of course, part of the storyline is right here in the book of Revelation, and it is pretty intense. However, there is a bigger storyline than just revival and trouble—the trouble that is increasing the pressure and the great revival. There is a bigger storyline: He is after our heart; He is preparing a Bride for His Son's return. When we lose sight of a Bridegroom King preparing a Bride, then the book of Revelation just becomes a book debating end-time charts, facts, and events.*

*Beloved, it is about a Bridegroom King beckoning a Church with a Laodicean attitude to be completely transformed that He might come for her as a prepared Bride. And that is what I call one of the greatest miracles in human history in terms of the human population. I mean the greatest miracle is Jesus coming and raising for the dead and then returning. That is the greatest one. However in terms of the human experience, the greatest miracle of human history is the transformation of the end-time church from a passive Laodicean spirit to a prepared Bride.*

*Beloved, I believe that there are people in this room, people alive today, who will see the culmination of this in their lifetime. I do not know that I will, and I might. I do not know, but I believe that we are in the early days of that generation and this message to these seven churches is of utmost importance. It is not like, "Well, hey, we did the seven churches. What are we going to do next?" We barely whispered about these seven churches. We went over them just ever so briefly, and I cannot think of anything more important than what Jesus says to these churches revealing His glory, His burning eyes, and His shining face.*

*The reason I am giving this long introduction is that I want you thinking, "Okay. Yeah, okay, I don't think we did it completely. I do not think we have it yet."*

*That is the attitude I am taking. "I do not have this yet, Lord. I want to go deep in these chapters." Not that in six or eight more weeks we will have "gone deep," but at least we will have gone beyond just a quick drive-by. At least we are looking at it more intently. Those of you who are students who are back home for the summer, I encourage you to join us on Friday nights or to check in with the archives and stay with this study because, for many of you, the Lord has your attention on it. Don't let that attention just kind of evaporate over the summer. This is a really important passage to pray, to sing, to preach, to disciple, to study: Revelation 1:1-3.*

- A. The book of Revelation is called the **revelation of Jesus** because it reveals the majesty of His heart and leadership. Second, it reveals events that will occur in His end-time plan to purify the Church, bring in the harvest, replace all the governments on earth, and transition it to the age to come.

***<sup>1</sup>The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him [Jesus] to show His servants... (Rev. 1:1)***

*The book of Revelation is called the revelation of Jesus. Much of this is review tonight as we have covered this at various times, but I do not apologize for that because it is more than "Yes, I have heard that before" as these truths and topics have to be before us in a focused, attentive way. They need to be before our hearts and our attentiveness. The book of Revelation—the whole storyline of twenty-two chapters—is actually called the unveiling of Jesus, or the revelation of Jesus. You could use the phrase, "the unveiling of Jesus." It is the revealing of a beautiful Man and His plan.*

*Many people read the book of Revelation and focus on the plan. The plan is important; that is why it has been written in the book. However, it is the Man behind the plan that is most important. And the Man is a King, but He is more than a king. We find out at the end of the book that He is a Bridegroom King and He is coming back for His people. For more than just an empire of obedience servants, He is coming back for a cherished Bride who is equally yoked in love. So more than a King coming back for His servants who have been faithful, but a Bridegroom King coming back for His cherished Bride who sees herself differently now. Through seeing who He is in this book and through walking through the challenges and the outpouring of the Spirit described in the book of Revelation, she changes the way she sees Him, she changes the way she sees herself, and she is transformed.*

*I have said many times, but it is good for us to remember that we love more by seeing more. When we see more, we feel more, and we are changed more. I do not encourage people to try harder to obey. I encourage them to*

*spend more time in order to see more. See more clearly and you will love more dearly. If you want to grow in love, don't put your energy on "I want to love. I want to love. I want to love!" No, do not try to grit your teeth and try to love. Rather, fill your heart with understanding and love will arise. If you see more, you will love more. That is the key.*

*And so here we are: the whole book is called the revelation, or I like to use the word the "unveiling," of the beauty of the Man Christ Jesus.*

- B. In Revelation 1-3, John shared a vision highlighting 30 descriptions of Jesus' majesty, ministry, and personality, and 22 eternal rewards. Each description and reward is a necessary aspect in equipping the end-time Church to overcome all sin as she is transformed as a "prepared Bride" (Rev. 19:7).

***<sup>7</sup>...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)***

*John shared this vision in chapters 1, 2 and 3, highlighting thirty descriptions of Jesus and twenty-two eternal rewards. These thirty descriptions—now what I am saying next is in a positive way, though it might sound negative, but I mean it in a most positive way—these thirty descriptions are mostly not known or recognized by the Church today. However, they have to be central to the Church that gets transformed into a prepared Bride. And so I do not want to just look at these thirty descriptions and say, "Those are strange terms, Lord. What meaneth Thou this?" I want to compare the Word with the Word and ask the Holy Spirit to help us, and I want to find out more about those thirty descriptions because Jesus believes these thirty descriptions are essential to the Church loving more because they see Him more clearly. And so He gave thirty descriptions of Himself—though you can add up the number in different ways and some people might categorize them a little differently—and then twenty-two rewards.*

*As we looked at in the last eight or nine weeks, some of these rewards are a bit cryptic sounding, and the Lord would say, "Compare the Word with the Word, and you will gain more understanding, and I will give you Holy-Spirit insight.*

*Do not give up too quickly on reading these descriptions and rewards and say, "I understand them!" No, there is something more than that meets the eye!*

*That is why after every one of the seven churches He said, "He that has ears let him hear," which means there is more than that which meets the eye. There are deeper things here. Pay attention! He says that seven times, after each of the seven churches: "There is more here than that meets the eye. Do not do a quick read and move on!" That is what He is saying here in this passage.*

*At the end of the book we see a "prepared Bride." It is a Bride that is transformed at the end of the age. And so I believe every one of these thirty descriptions and twenty-two rewards are essential.*

- C. Engaging with Jesus in context to these 30 descriptions of Him will lead the Church to cry out to Him, being established in her spiritual identity as a cherished Bride (Rev. 22:17).

***<sup>17</sup>The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)***

*What is the description of the Church at the end of all of the events of the book of Revelation? There will be the challenging troubles and the out-pouring of the Spirit because there are two things; a mighty outpouring of the Spirit that is coming, the greatest in history, and also the greatest trouble. It is the two together. It is not one or the other. Well, the net result is that the Church is in a bridal identity in the place of crying out to Jesus. She is in a spirit of prayer, crying "Come, Lord Jesus!" She is not too busy to engage Him in that hour. There will be more pressure than at any other time in history, but the Church will be more engaged with His heart in this time*

where it will be the most difficult to engage with His heart because there are more pressures. They will be gripped, fascinated with His love and His beauty, absolutely fascinated. The Church will be in her bridal identity, and they will be engaging—"Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Bridegroom King!"—not too busy to engage, even with all of the difficulties mounting up around the earth. That is a glorious reality.

Now the Church in two thousand years has never seen herself, not universally, as a Bride. The Church has seen herself as an army, as a family, as a kingdom, as priests, as a temple, and various things. However, the majority of the Church has never, in two thousand years, seen herself as a cherished Bride. I mean, there are always a few here or there, but the Spirit is going to emphasize it as He reveals these thirty descriptions of Jesus. These thirty descriptions of Jesus, when we see these facets, are meant to lead us to see ourselves as the cherished Bride. That is the point. If you read the thirty descriptions and study them out separated from where the Church is at the end of age as a cherished Bride, you are missing what these thirty descriptions are about. You are missing some of the keys.

So whatever it is talking about, it is always referring to something that awakens the Bride in love and causes her to see her value as a cherished Bride and engage with Him more. And so because of those very points, I look at this passage, and I think, "Lord, I am just ravenously hungry to understand this more! If this is the key to seeing more clearly and to loving more dearly, I want to go deep in this passage." And so that is what I am doing here in these first minutes. Well, we are not going to get very far in the notes, I can tell. However I want to really grip you with the value of going deep in these three chapters here.

- D. **The Bridegroom revival:** Jesus will come to His people as a Bridegroom who wants all of their heart. The end-time "Bridegroom revival" will be far more invasive than any revival in history. Jesus will reveal and impart His love in an unprecedented way that will transform the Church.

There is a Bridegroom revival coming. It is not just a great, end-time revival. It is that, but it is more than the greatest revival in history. It will be the greatest revival in history, but it is what I call a Bridegroom revival because in this we, the Body of Christ around the whole world, are going to see Him for the first time, a billion believers or whatever the number is.

Now the revelation of a bridegroom is far more invasive than the king. The King wants faithful service; the Bridegroom wants all of your heart. This is invasive, meaning He is coming in deep for everything.

Many of the past revivals focused on the revelation of the Lordship of Jesus, the King who wants faithful servants to do His will. I do not know all that there is to know about all of the revivals, though I have studied them a bit over the years, and that is fantastic. However, the Bridegroom revival is going to have that as well as He will say, "I want all of your heart. I want the secret imaginations, the things you dream and think about. I am coming after all of your heart, but the good news is that I am going to reveal more of My heart to you than I have ever done with the Church in all of church history." That is a remarkable reality. There is coming a revelation and an impartation of His fiery heart and His burning eyes like no time in history. And, because I believe that, I study this. I really believe there is coming an impartation and a revelation of His burning heart. That is what makes me lock into this because I am convinced the Spirit is prepared to release it, even in these early days.

- E. Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:37-38 is one of the most significant statements in Scripture.

<sup>37</sup>"**You shall love the Lord...with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**'

<sup>38</sup>**This is the first and great commandment.**" (Mt. 22:37-38)

One of the most significant statements in all the scripture, we know it by heart: "Love God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength." And we are so familiar with it that we say, "Okay, yes, that is cool!"

Here is the significant part, verses 37 and 38. Jesus said, "This is the highest priority to God. It is first, and it is what God calls greatest." Even if you miss out on a number of other things, but you pursue this, God says your life is the greatest. This is a radical revelation! If the Church gets verse 38 alone, it will transform them because they will cease to define their life by what others in the Body of Christ define as successful. They will define their life by growing in love in a way that nobody can even define about them because nobody can see the secret growth in your heart of love or the secret exchanges.

I don't mean that it is all secret, but it is in your heart, and they look at you and say, "Well, I do not know he is or he is not. I do not know."

The Lord would say, "I am seeing it. I am watching your heart." This is one of the most significant statements in the Bible that Jesus gave, right before He would go to the cross, Matthew 22 is right before the cross, a couple of days before the cross, His final public message. His final public message is Matthew 22. After this He rebukes the leadership of Israel, then everything else is in private.

Here is His final public message. He says, "This thing of loving Me—God calls it absolute top priority!" I tell people that whatever the Spirit is saying to you, He is saying this to you first.

"God is calling me to go to this and to do that and do miracles and make money, impact people, and reach this group!" I believe that, but that is second. He is calling you to something else first, and if you think your primary calling is to go to that group and to do those miracles and make that much money and give it to the kingdom and touch these people, if you think that is first, it is going to burn you out and bruise your heart. If you think that is second and that your first calling, your greatest calling, the highest priority of the Spirit's word to your life is to love Him with all of your heart, then you can make sense of things when the delay of promises and problems come, when people treat you badly. You will say, "Yeah, but I am on track! I am still fulfilling the highest calling, the first commandment."

1. **First:** The Spirit's first priority and emphasis is for God's people to grow in love for God.
2. **Great:** It has the greatest impact on God's heart and our heart, and it is the greatest calling.

<sup>19</sup>...**whoever does and teaches them [commands], he shall be called great in the kingdom...**  
(Mt. 5:19)

Jesus called it the greatest commandment: when you choose to love Him and to cultivate love, because our love is weak, but our love is real even when it is weak. However, when I set my heart to take time to cultivate love—because you do not cultivate love on the run. It takes time to cultivate a heart response of love and tenderness toward the Lord. You will not get that on the run. And if you are like most believers, content with Christianity on the run, like serving Jesus, and occasionally blowing Him a kiss saying, "I love You! Get back with You later! Oh, I love You so much!" and you are content with that style of Christianity, I want to assure you that is the norm in the Body of Christ. Now it sounds like I am putting down the Body of Christ. That is not where my heart is. My heart is saying we need to know He has another agenda. He is saying that there is something greater. Do not try to cultivate love on the run. It takes times to cultivate a responsive heart. You are not going to do it on the run, maybe a little bit because we still need to be serving Him. If we love Him, we are going to love people.

Some folks say, "Well, I am really into loving people, too."

*I say, "Love Him. You think that if you love the Lion, you won't love the people He loves? Are you kidding? He will devour everything in your life that gets in the way of love. Believe me, if you love Him, you will be on fire for people. You do not have to worry about loving people if you run into Him. He is the ultimate lover of human beings, and when you touch that Lion's heart, He will devour everything that gets in the way of loving other people."*

*So I am not talking about the dichotomy of loving Him or loving people. That is a false dichotomy which is not even real. If you love Him, you will love people. I am talking about such activism where you blow kisses to Him and you imagine that you are cultivating love while you are on the run without stopping to be intentional. It will not happen. I can tell you after forty-plus years of ministry of watching it and in my own life: it has to be intentional to cultivate a responsive heart. The most natural thing is not to grow in love. The most natural thing is for the weeds to grow in the garden and choke love. The most natural thing is to diminish the love. By intentionality we cultivate a responsive heart.*

*That is what you will see in the session notes. He told the church of Ephesus, "Man, you are involved in the greatest revival ever in Ephesus, yet you do not love Me like you used to!" He told the church at Sardis, "You have a reputation that you are on fire for God, that you are alive, that you are anointed. But you are dead! You are not responding at the heart level like you did in the early days." He told Laodicea, "You think you are rich because God has blessed you with money, opportunities, and all kinds of open doors, but you are lukewarm! And it hurts My heart." It says, "I will vomit you," but most translations indicate, "My heart is grieved," that is, "over the way that you have been content to just minimize your walk with Me to 'serve Me.' I do not want you doing tasks that cause you to be more disconnected from Me." So to three of the churches He is saying the same thing from a different angle: you cannot cultivate a responsive heart on the run. "I'm serving, serving, serving, serving, serving, serving, serving, serving, serving..."*

*People are over-serving because they are establishing their own identity, their own reputation, or they are networking or garnering ways of human favor for more open doors. And those things are not bad in themselves, but a lot of folks imagine their overwork is all about Jesus, but for a whole lot it is really about their identity as being seen as being radical or available and helpful. The Lord would say, "Get your identity from loving Me, not from people applauding you in your works." If you do that, you will end up burned out at the end of the day and you will end up bruised because the people applauding you today will not always applaud you tomorrow. If that is where you are getting the strength of your heart, well, again, I will just pull the old-man card forty-plus years later, many on-fire people stay on fire for three to five years, and they get bit at the heart level by the human responses of the people they are serving, and they just say, "Well, that is how the Church is!"*

*I say, "No, the Church will always be human and weak until those very final hours. Get your identity in being loved and being a lover! That is where your identity is, not in being the man of God in power for the hour who does the most diligent etc.!" Get your identity in being loved and being a lover, and then when folks disappoint you, when the promises are delayed, when the provision is delayed, you will still have a narrative burning in your heart: you are loved and you are a lover.*

*That needs to be burning in your heart because many of the promises end up being delayed. And when the promises are delayed—I have some serious promises from the Lord that have been confirmed supernaturally that I have been waiting on for thirty-five, forty years. I say "Lord, hey, it's me!!! Hey ya!"*

*He would say, "Yes, I know. We are good," then I say, "Well, I was just thinking these things would have happened a long time ago." He would say, "No we are good. We are good. You just keep loving Me and I am going to keep loving you. We are fine."*

*And so I know what it means to face delayed promises, delayed provision. I know what it means to face people that you are serving and then they are not so happy later. My point is not that it is "Bah-humbug!" The whole Body of Christ faces that, and if their love is not intentional and if we are not making it our primary thing, our love diminishes. And so I want to tell you the Great commandment, the great commandment, the one that moves God the greatest, the one that moves you the greatest is that you would intentionally cultivate a responsive heart of love. He said this statement here in Matthew 5 that I have preached on so many times here, and for those that have been here for years, you have heard it over and over. I just cannot get over it! He said, "Whoever teaches these things and does them will be called great." God will call their life choices great on the last day.*

*Can you imagine God calling your life choices great on the last day, because you did these things and you taught them? Well, in context He is talking about the eight beatitudes right before it, and He is talking about the general spirit of the Word of God, the Sermon on the Mount, which sums up the law and the prophets. The eight beatitudes here in the Sermon on the Mount is one of my favorite passages. He says whoever embraces this lifestyle, they do it from the heart, and they teach it, God will call their life great.*

*Now the reason this verse staggers me beyond measure is because of the word "whoever." We think it is the rich and the famous ministries in the Body of Christ who have hundreds of thousands or millions that they are touching. He would say, "It could be them, but it is 'whoever.' If they have a million people that they are impacting, but they are not doing the eight beatitudes and teaching that I love them, their life is not great before Me. They may have a big profile, but if they are not teaching the eight beatitudes and pursuing them, while I still appreciate their service, I still appreciate their love, I love them, but it is not what I call great." And the thing that excites me about Jesus and troubles me a bit as well but excites me more is that He never changes. You cannot get Him to change. I do not care if you are the most famous guy in the world, when you stand before that Man with burning eyes and say "No! Do you know what I did for you?" He will look unmoved. You cannot move Him, not one percent. I love that about Him but there is no point in thinking that He is going to evaluate us differently.*

*He says "Whoever." You take that guy—I like to talk about the hypothetical guy who does not exist by the way so do not start crying in the middle of it as I describe it. He does not exist—There is this guy. he has no gifts at all, no gifts operating in his life at all, none. He has no education; he cannot read or write. He has no friends. When he says "Hey!" no one listens to him. He has no money. He lives on the street under the bridge. Remember he does not exist, so wipe the tear out of your eye. He has no friends, no gifts, no training, no money, no following, no place on the church org chart ministries, nothing. He lives under the bridge, not really, but he says, "Jesus, I am trying to do these eight beatitudes. Nobody will listen to me, but I am teaching them to the ones and twos when I get chance."*

*Jesus would say, "Got it! Your life is great!" It will be the shock of his life because the Lord said, "I said 'anybody.' Anybody who will do those and teach them."*

*Teach them one on one, tell them to the eight-year-olds next to you that say, "Hey, Mister, what are you doing?"*

*"I am trying to walk out the eight beatitudes"*

*"What is a beatitude?"*

*It does not matter who the people are you are teaching. You are taking a stand for it. I will give you a little hint, though, for those of you that are new to the kingdom. I thought that doing the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount was the hard part. Wait until you start teaching it! It will create a storm of controversy when you*

*teach the Sermon on the Mount. I found teaching it is more challenging than doing it; I thought it would be the other way around. I thought, "Whoa!" People will scream and shout all kinds of Bible rhetoric in the face of the Sermon on the Mount. So I think, having taught it over the years, that teaching it is a tricky one, though that seems like the easy one. However, you will only stay with it for one reason: because you love Him and He knows it. He knows that He will call that life great because few will stay with that lifestyle over their lifetime. They might give it a shot for five or ten years, but I am talking about over the decades. Only one thing will keep them locked in: the intentionality to love. They will want to draw back and want to quit. The promises are delayed, the provision delayed, the people are not responding, the work is mundane, and they will say "Oh! I do not know. I do not want to do this!" Then they look up and say, "But I love You and You love me! I have to keep doing this. You love me and I love you."*

*So Jesus knows that is involved in this verse right here, because when He says, "Whoever does and teaches," He means in the continual sense. It is that continuous, present-tense, keep on, keep on doing, keep on teaching, staying with it more than a semester or summer, more than a year or two. Staying with it, decade after decade. Beloved, when I see this word, "great," and Jesus said, "God will call that person's lifestyle great," I mean, that is gold right there. Matthew 5:19 is gold. Then you put that together with what He calls great in Matthew 22 when He said, "If you love Me, that is the greatest thing," because you will never do the verse in Matthew 5, I just said, without connecting it to love.*

*Well, let's look at a few more and get a little further, and, you know me, I am never in a hurry to get done with something and we are going to be around for a while. I mean, the Bible is here and so we will just devour it week by week and year by year. I am in no hurry.*

*I am going to give just a sentence or two on each one of them and not spend a whole lot of time on each one. And then we will probably come back and look at some more of this next week. Actually what I really want to get to are the thirty descriptions and the twenty-two rewards. I want to get to teasing them out a bit more. I want to do it to serve you, but I also want to do it because I am hungry to get it more too. I want to get it inside of me. I find that when I search it out and share it with others, I get into a flow that pulls my heart in that direction. So I pick topics after I have asked the Lord what is on His heart, but I also pick topics on Friday night that my heart needs to be pulled into in a new and renewed way. I say to the Lord, "Lord, I need to drink deeper of these!" So I am going to take the next twelve or eighteen weeks and I am just going to go for it. And I know that almost always over the years, I look back and say, "Aghhhhhh! You touched me more than I thought!" And so some of this is sanctified selfishness and I am just kind of doing it for myself, allowing you to ease-drop, but part of it is my pastor's heart because I care about you, and so it is both/and, not either/or.*

- F. Jesus defined loving God as being rooted in a spirit of obedience (Jn. 14:15-21). We are to love God on God's terms. To "keep His commands" includes setting our heart *both* to obey and pursue Jesus diligently *and* not to quit in our divine assignments, even in times of delay and difficulty.

<sup>15</sup>*"If you love Me, keep My commandments." (Jn. 14:15)*

- G. **Loving God with all our heart:** With zeal, we engage our heart with Jesus in pursuing and obeying Him. Some are dutiful in serving Him without engaging their heart with Him. We "set our love" on God by determining that the *primary dream* (purpose) of our life is to pursue walking out the first commandment by grace. Other blessings—family, vocation, ministry—flow from loving God.

<sup>14</sup>*"Because he has set his love [heart] upon Me, therefore I will deliver him." (Ps. 91:14)*

*Loving Him with all of your heart. He wants us to pursue loving Him with zeal. It is the Misty song, "How far will You let me go? How abandoned will You let me be?" That is not the question in the Body of Christ today. Today it is, "Do I have to do that to be on fire? Where is that in the Bible?" Wrong question, if your question is "Do I have to do that?" I mean, that is a legitimate question sometimes, but that cannot be your main question. Your question is, "How far will You let me go, Lord? How abandoned will You let me be?"*

*So the person loving God with all of their heart is engaging at the heart level. And they do not want to be just naïve and just kind of a sucker to anyone who comes along with a new idea. "I want to do it to love God!" No, you want to root it in the Word, and you want it to be soundly established in the Word. I am saying that the question is not, "How can I get out of it?" The question is, "How can You strengthen me to do it more?" That is the right question and is in our weakness.*

*I mean I never go as far as I want to go because my human weakness keeps showing up, but I keep saying, "I want to go! I want to reengage with You at that level!"*

*And He would say, "Yes, you have been saying that for a long time. Stay with it though! Stay with it." So I do not look at my weak love and write it off because, as I have said many times, weak love is still sincere love. He does not only look at our love when it is mature. He looks at our love when it is intentional. Even when it is weak it matters to Him.*

*Well, some people are content with being dutiful, as long as they are active and they are serving. It is, "Hey, some people are getting blessed. I am helping!" Now, that is good, and I am not putting that down at all. Earlier I was putting down the over-activism that disconnects your heart from Him. I am really into serving. Serving is really important. As a matter of fact, it is great in the kingdom, but when you over-serve to the point where you disconnect at the heart level from the Lord, then something is going to break pretty soon, and you are going to quit serving actually at the end of the day. A lot of folks are content being dutiful. They will serve Him hard, and they will sweat and at the end of the day go to bed exhausted, but He would say, "I want more than dutiful. I want engaged. I want it from your heart. I appreciate your hands, but I want there to be a conscious growing of the conversation between our hearts."*

*In Psalm 91, the Psalmist says, "Because"—now this is the Lord speaking—"Because this man set his love upon Me." I tell you this is a great truth. There is a moment in a person's life, not every believer. I know in my life it was a moment, and I have had to renew the moment a thousand times, but there was a moment—I remember it was years ago—when I determined that the primary dream of my life was not have a big ministry and a happy family. That had been my dream: to have a powerful impact in ministry and to have a godly family with deep relationships, and that is still important to me. However, I remember the day when I shifted and said, "Walking in the anointing of the first commandment is actually my first dream. I do not know how to do it." It was some years ago. I was just a young pastor in my twenties. I thought, "I do not know how to do it, but now that is the thing I am going to search out more than anything."*

*I have lost my way a handful of times over the years and had to realign, realign, realign, but there was a day, and I meant it, where I set my heart so the primary dream of my heart was not economic blessing—and I like economic blessing—was not a godly family—which is way at the top of my list—and godly relationships and friendships—and I really care about godly kingdom friendships. It is not to have a big ministry and to have God's power and impact. I want to impact people in the power of God; I love that, but that is not number one though it was for few years, those things, all my friendships and family. I shifted it intentionally, and I said, "God, what would it look like to spend the next number of decades"—now I was in my twenties and you do not know how long you are going to live but I said—"What would it look like to make pursuing the first*

commandment first. What would it look like?" The answer was, well, I did not get an answer. Just do it, and you will learn over the years.

Nearly forty years later I wish I would have learned more. I mean I wish I would have learned more, though I have learned a lot, but not enough. I want to learn way more, and I thought by now I would be further than I am. However that is neither here nor there. Meaning, you do not measure it; you just keep signing up for it. I quit measuring years ago. Someone might ask, "Well, are you doing better than before?" I respond, "I do not know, and I do not care. What I care about is that I am doing it hard today. I do not know how to measure yesterday. I already pushed delete on yesterday. I am going hard today." And "hard" does not mean, "Agh! Yeah!!!!" I do not mean that by hard. I mean focused. I want to encounter Him. I want to do His will. I want to search out His Word. That is what I mean by hard. And so I am not talking about a frenzied emotion. That is not what I mean by hard. I mean a focused, "I am going to go hard tomorrow. I am going to be focused." And then tomorrow comes, and did I gain ground? I do not know. I am going to go hard tomorrow, though.

I found that that is the secret, and I do not know how much ground I have gained, but it does not matter if I know. All that matters is that you sign up again tomorrow to go with all of your heart and do it again. That was the most significant choice of my spiritual life. I have been in the kingdom since 1971 when I got radically saved, so I am moving onto fifty years in a few years from now. And I have been going hard for the Lord by the grace of God since then, since 1971. And I do not know how far I have gained. I don't even know, and I don't overly care. I just know that I am going to sign up tomorrow and do it again. However, the most important decision I have made in those however many years it is since 1971, this was the most important decision I have ever made as a believer.

Again, when I was in my early twenties, I said, "I am going to set my heart to love You"—this verse here—"I am going to make the first commandment the number one dream of my heart, to walk in that anointing more than ministry, than godly friendships, than financial prosperity and blessings, godly family, and more than impact." And, again, I want all of those things, but what would that look like? And the answer is: I did not get an answer. I do not know what it looks like other than to go and re-sign up every day despite failures, disappointments, setbacks, weariness. Hit delete and sign up again! That is the key right there. That is probably the most important thing I will ever tell you—if you have been here for a few years—push delete and sign up again! That is it right there.

If I looked at my life that would be one of the most important sentences I can tell you.

- H. **Loving God with all our mind:** We express love for God with our mind by putting things into our mind that inspire love for God instead things that diminish our capacity to love Him. What we do with our mind affects our ability to receive and express love. We show love for God by taking time to fill our mind with His Word and refusing to feed our mind on lust (Job 31:1).

<sup>1</sup>**"I have made a covenant with my eyes; why should I look upon a young woman?" (Job 31:1)**

Loving God with all of your mind. Do you know how you love God with all of your mind? You know you do not just love Him by engaging your heart. You love God by what you put in your mind. Did you know that when you take time to put things in your mind—because it takes time to put things in your mind, whether you are watching them on a media situation, whether you are in a meeting or in a conversation, whether you are in the prayer room or in your own personal study, whether you are walking and meditating; I mean there are a hundreds ways to put it in your mind—did you know that when you put things in your mind that inspire you to love God that is called "loving God with your mind." It is very practical.

*It takes time to do it, and what you put in your mind affects your ability to receive love and to express it back to God and to people. If you put certain things in your mind, you will receive the love of God in a greater capacity and you will express it to Him and to people. If you put other things in your mind that diminish your capacity to receive and express love, it will just do that. It will diminish your capacity.*

*Some folks say, "Well, I made a commitment to love God," but then they spend hours putting things in their mind with the whole social media craze, all the media stuff. I mean the media thing is going to be so gigantic in ten and twenty years from now. I am thinking of the population of the earth in twenty years that will be far more inundated with the media than today. We couldn't even imagine it compared to ten years ago. Where is the inundation of media in twenty and thirty years going? Who knows? It requires turning things off and turning away from things. I am talking about events, activities, taking time to put things in your mind that inspire love, and I am talking about the Word of God. I am talking not just about Bible knowledge. It is more than that, investing your time to put things in your mind because when you see more, you love more, and it will inspire your heart.*

*Refusing to put things in your mind that will inspire lust. We are in a generation where pornography is exploding in the last ten years, and where it will be in the next twenty years I cannot even imagine. However it is going to be an intentional decision because Jesus is not coming back for a Church weighed down with a Laodicean spirit. He is coming back for a Church that is a prepared Bride. There is going to be a billion of them. Again, I never know the real number, but there are going to be a billion who are going to choose love with their mind, a billion. And your choice is going to be one of them, you and your children, and maybe their children. I mean, we do not know how much time we have. Job 31:1 said it clearly. Job said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes," and what he means here is: "I will not look on situations that stir up lust in my heart." That is what he was talking about. He said, "I have made a covenant. I am not going to look on situations that arouse lust," whether it is male, female, this, that, or the other. I mean there are a hundred expressions, and that is the idea. Beloved, we are in an hour where the enemy has raised up a spirit of lust in pornography as a direct attack against the first commandment to love God with our minds. It really matters what we do with our minds. I mean it really matters.*

- I. **Loving God with all our strength** (Mk. 12:30): We express love for God in the way we use our strength and natural resources (time, money, energy, talents, words, influence). We love God with our strength as we do the things that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7): *servicing*, *giving* (6:1-4, 19-21), *praying* (6:5-13), *blessing*, *forgiving* (5:44; 6:14), etc.

*Loving God with our strength. To love God with your strength is your natural resources, with your time, your money, your energy. You are loving God with your strength by being in a meeting like this. If I had you raise your hand, "How many of you are tired?" believe me, a whole lot of hands would go up. But you are here, you are in a meeting, and you are doing your best to lean forward and to learn. Beloved, you are loving God with your strength right now. Some of you were in a meeting yesterday and the day before. I do not necessarily mean a Bible study, but you were in a meeting talking to somebody, and you would rather have been at home chilling, but you were there talking to them, and you were encouraging them, and you were pouring yourself out to them. You are spending your strength to get that person to love God. God would say, "You are loving Me with your strength, with your time, your energy, your words."*

*Words are exhausting. There are lots of times when you do not feel like it, but you are doing it because you are loving God with your strength. Many times I am tired and this, that, and the other, and I say, "Lord, I want to love You with my strength. I want to bring my energy into the relationship and to get other people to love you."*

*The Lord would say, "I got it. I got it all in My book. it is all in My book I have it all written down here."*

*So my point is that I want you to connect that what you are doing right now is loving God with your strength and mind, literally, right now. And what you are doing tomorrow and the next day and the next day is not about Bible studies—a little bit—but it is about many activities where you use your strength and your money to love God.*

*There are a handful of people at the Weekends at IHOPKC and the Immerse program where they paid a thousand dollars—I just made up that number—some say, "More than that. I got on an airplane, flew across, got a hotel, rented a car"—to go hear teachings, to go and sit in the prayer room and cry! They are investing their strength to love God. That is what is going on. That is amazing to do that! Bible school students, you are investing your strength! And far beyond that, when you are supporting a missionary, you are investing your strength in them to love God, to help them love God, to help others love God, and it goes on and on and on.*

- J. ***Loving God with all our soul:*** Our primary success and identity is found in being ones whom God loves and who love God. We confess, "I am loved by God and I am a lover of God; therefore, I am successful." Our identity is determined by the way that we define our success and value and by how we see ourselves. When our identity is rooted in what we achieve and who applauds us, then we burn out. We express love for God *with our soul* when we exert the emotional energy to realign our heart to base our identity on our relationship with God instead of on our accomplishments, recognition, etc. We must often realign our thinking to agree with the truth of who we are in Him.

*We are going to end with this: to love God with all of your soul. To love God with all of your soul. Before I talk about what it is—some of you have heard this over the years—this is the most challenging of all of the four: loving God with your heart, your mind, your strength. This one is the most challenging of them all. However, first I want to make the premise or point for a minute that our primary success, our primary identity, the Lord wants it to be found in being in our relationship with Him. When my primary success is in the fact that I know He loves me and I love Him back, if that what makes me valuable and successful, then my identity is established rightly. If my primary success in the way I evaluate my life is that you applaud my ministry, it is going to bruise my life. If my identity is found in you being encouraged and blessed by what I do in my ministry, sooner or later that is not going to hold my heart steady. People are not always going to be blessed, and there are always setbacks. So we confess, "I am loved by God, and I am a lover of God. I am not just a worker for God. I am a lover of God too. I love God; He loves Me; therefore, I am successful."*

*Beloved, our identity is determined in how we define why we are valuable and successful. Am I valuable if IHOPKC gets bigger? Am I successful if IHOPKC gets bigger? No, I am successful if my heart gets bigger. If IHOPKC gets smaller, but my heart gets bigger, I am successful! If I can connect with that and stay with that. Put into any situation you want. Put it in a family situation, ministry, marketplace, academic achievements, sports, whatever you want to put. If your success is when that gets better—and there is success in that arena but that is a secondary success in your life; I am talking about the primary success. A lot of people get confused between their primary success and value of their life and the secondary. I want to be successful in the secondary ways, but I am not going to sell out my primary success for the secondary ones. I am not going to do it. I do sometimes, but when I catch it, I say, "Aghhhhh! I did it again! I repent, Lord!"*

*When our identity is rooted in what we achieve and who applauds us, finances, academics, military, political office, marketplace growth, athletic abilities, music, etc., if what you do to get people to applaud you is why you are important, your life is going to be bruised and burned out many, many times in the years ahead because you cannot sustain it. God did not create the human heart to sustain itself by that audience. And He would say, "No,*

*you are successful because of our relationship. I love you.” You know what? God loves a billion believers, but not all of them are pursuing Him and so their life is not fully successful yet. He loves them, and that is good, that is fantastic actually, but until they respond to love Him back, even in their weakness, where they set their heart, their life is not successful yet no matter how big their ministry, or business, or how big their whatever is.*

*So here is the point: when we express loving God with our soul, here is what we are doing. We are exerting the emotional energy to realign our heart and base our identity in our relationship with God. Meaning, I love God with my soul when things out there are going good or bad in my life, and I say, “No, I am going to realign myself.” It takes exerting emotional energy to do it. I say, “Wait! You love me. I love You, and I have made that the goal of my life; therefore I am successful!” so I can come back and go to work at IHOPKC.*

*I have had people ask over the years, “Is it hard? Is it easy? Is it fun? Is it exciting? Is this your dream?” because thirty-five years ago we put a sign in our church, “Twenty-four-seven prayer in the Spirit of the Tabernacle of David” which means with singers and musicians. God spoke that audibly thirty-six years ago, so we put a sign in our church. And so I was in a church for some years; seventeen years I pastored before I started IHOPKC, and many people saw that sign. And then twenty years ago—you know that we are in our twentieth-year anniversary now—I resigned the church, started IHOPKC, and so IHOPKC has grown and this and that and our footprint is touching this amount of people here and there, and through the social media, and the big Onething conferences. And so I have run into my former church members—we had three or four thousand in the church then—and I will see them at weddings and funerals, and they will say, “Mike! It’s amazing! It is amazing with that sign on the wall, that IHOPKC sign, that prayer thing you were going to do all those years ago!”—because it was for fifteen or sixteen years we had that sign or something like that—“Your dream, it happened!”*

*I love to tell them, not arrogantly or brashly, “IHOPKC is not my dream. Having a big Onething conference is not my dream. Having x-amount of millions of people being touched by IHOPKC is not my dream, are you kidding? I appreciate it, and I would rather it go well than bad, I promise you. However, that is not my dream though. My dream is the anointing to walk in the first commandment. IHOPKC really big or really little cannot touch the dream of my heart. All the men of the earth in unity, whether for me or against me, cannot touch the dream of my heart! The devil cannot touch the dream of my heart by causing problems in my circumstances. There is a dream in my heart that no human can touch. That is not the dream of my heart.”*

*And they say “No, you know, all of those people in that big conference!”*

*“That is not my dream. That is my assignment. I appreciate it. And I will tell you, I do like it when it goes better than worse. I do, but I am not going to make that the dream of my heart.”*

*However, loving God with my soul is when I stop and realign my identity: that is not who I am; that is not my value when it is bad or good; that is not who I am. “You love me, and I love You; therefore, I am successful. That is who I am.” That is loving God with your soul.*

## **II. JESUS CALLED THEM TO RETURN TO THEIR FIRST LOVE (2:4)**

- A. Jesus corrected the church of Ephesus for neglecting to love Him in the way that was initially so prominent in the great Ephesian revival (Acts 19). Service and doctrinal purity are very important, but they can never replace taking time to cultivate our love for and communion with Jesus.

***<sup>1</sup>“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write...<sup>2</sup>I know your works...<sup>3</sup>you have persevered... and labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup>...I have this against you, that you***

**have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>Remember from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.”**  
**(Rev. 2:1-5)**

- B. The church in Sardis had a reputation for its dedication to Jesus, but had become spiritually dead. They were dead or asleep in their spiritual life as evidenced by their lack of hunger for His Word and being weighed down with things like fear, shame, despair, depression, or compromise, etc.

<sup>1</sup>**To...the church in Sardis write, ‘...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.**  
<sup>2</sup>**Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...<sup>3</sup>Remember**  
**therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.”** (Rev. 3:1-3)

- C. Jesus promised the church of Laodicea deep fellowship and honor both now and in the age to come. He required that they repent of lukewarmness in their relationship with Him.

<sup>14</sup>**To the...Laodiceans write...<sup>15</sup>“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...<sup>16</sup>you are lukewarm...<sup>17</sup>Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—**  
**and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’—<sup>18</sup>I counsel you to**  
**buy from Me gold refined in the fire...<sup>19</sup>As many as I love, I rebuke...be zeal and repent.”**  
**(Rev. 3:14-19)**

*Amen, let's stand. Well, Joshua, that was just for you! Joshua came to me on Tuesday and said, “Man, I am searching this out like crazy! What does loving God with all your soul mean?” Well, in the GPR, I am only allowed to talk for thirty seconds, and that is a big topic.” He said, “I am dying to know that!”*

*I said “I love that!” Anyway, I don't know whether you were here tonight, but here you go. That was just for you.*

*For those of you who came in late, I made a commitment a year ago to be at something over at the YWAM base, so I have to slip out. That is why we started the worship early tonight. It was supposed to be on Saturday night, but they shifted it to Friday, so I have to keep my word to get over there in a minute.*

*Lord, we love you. Mark our hearts.*

*Benji, where is Benji at? He is going to lead the ministry time. Benji, I want to call people to setting our love on Him. Setting our heart on loving Him. Shifting, shifting that dream of our heart. Beloved, it is never too late. You may be eighty years old; it is way better to do now than never. You may be twenty. This is the time to start. It really is. However, you are not going to find a lot of support in the culture or even in the Body of Christ as there will be a lot of arguments against it when it comes to practicalities. Just smile and do not be argumentative, but say, “I understand, but I have set my heart to love Him, and that is where I am going.” And you will be challenged, and there will be setbacks. Just keep signing up and pushing delete, day after day. Benji, that is what you are doing. I have watched you for years. That is what you set your heart to do. I love it, man.*