

sermon study summary

STATE OF THE CHURCH – VISION ADDRESS PART 1

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Once a year Pastor Henry gives a state of the church address in which he focuses on what God has been doing in and through our church, what God is saying to us as a church, and where He is leading us.

In addition to the Old Testament commands to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus gave a new command: “Love one another.” Our focus and priority should be nothing more than to love God, love others, and love one another.

But our enemy Satan has used Covid to create a perfect storm to keep us from doing so. Satan’s 3 D’s are:

1. To DISTANCE us from God (to mess with our love for and relationship with God).
2. To DIVIDE us (to mess with our love for and relationship with one another).
3. To DISTRACT us from our God-given mission (to prevent us from loving, serving and sharing our love for Jesus with others).

Jesus commended the church in Ephesus for their hard work and perseverance in doing good (Rev. 20:2-3). Though others may not see your deeds coming for your love and devotion to Him, JESUS sees your servant heart, your service for Him, and your faithfulness. And the apostle Paul reminds us, “Your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

But Jesus’ letter to the church in Ephesus continues: “Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first.”

Our ‘First love’ treasures Jesus as we did when we first committed our lives to Him. But the romance fades when we hit a wall called REALITY. Our love for God can grow cold because of sin and disobedience, neglect of our quiet time with God, counterfeit idols (such as, pursuit of status, approval, pleasure, comfort, or things) and just plain boredom.

When we experience pleasure, our brains produce dopamine, a chemical that plays a starring role in motivating behavior. Our smart phones exert a powerful pull similar to what drug addicts experience. Smartphones and other social media have provided us with a virtually unlimited supply of social stimuli, both positive and negative. Excessive time watching television or on our smartphones can draw us away from God.

The Apostle Paul said, “Everything is permissible for me but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12). Luke 8:14 warns us that our seed of faith can be “choked by life’s worries, riches AND PLEASURES.” The more distracted we are digitally, the more displaced we become spiritually. Pursuing pleasure may bring us to the place where we become less and less tolerant, even annoyed, at anything that doesn’t give us a dopamine hit or instant gratification.

Paul warns, “For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3).

To restore our first love, we must consider how far we have fallen and regularly ask the Lord to search our hearts. The next step is to repent. Turn around and go the opposite direction; come back home to God where you belong. If we don’t, the light of Jesus within us will be dimmed, our ministry as Christians will diminish, and our church will lack power and effectiveness.

God didn’t create us to ignore us or for us to ignore Him. Draw close to Jesus.

sermon study guide

IN – PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. Truth Talk (no judgments): How many hours per day do you spend entertaining yourself on your phone, computer, or TV?
2. When was a time you were physically at a distance from a loved one? How far away were you, and for how long? How did it impact your relationship?

UP – PURSUE GOD

Read *Revelation 2:2-5*

3. Jesus is speaking to the church in the city of Ephesus. How does He both encourage and challenge this church? How might they have fallen from their first love?

Read *Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 6:19-21, 22:37-40, 24:12; Luke 8:14; John 13:34; 1 Corinthians 15:32b,58; 2 Timothy 4:3-4*

4. From these Scriptures, what things may hinder or restore our first love for God?

OUT – PURSUE MISSION

5. How has your love for the Lord increased or decreased over time? What might be something you need to repent of? As Pastor Henry asked, how can you change your mind about how you are living and instead do the things you did when you first fell in love with Jesus?
6. What is the relationship between your love for God and your effectiveness in sharing the gospel? What actions/steps will you take to keep your church's/group's 'lampstand' in place?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58b). Are you in a season of spiritual lethargy, or are you spiritually ‘charged up’? Pray that God would show you how to give yourself fully to His work, to strengthen and empower you to live a victorious Christian life.

The Word (NIV)

Revelation 2:2-5

² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Psalm 139:23-24

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 24:12

Luke 8:14

John 13:34

1 Corinthians 15:32b,58

2 Timothy 4:3-4

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