

MADLY IN LOVE WITH JESUS

Message by Pastor Joe Keenan on May 6, 2007

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame **before Him in love.**” (Ephesians 1:3-4)*

The question for the church today is: “Are we madly in love with Jesus?” In our Christian walk, there are various stages and depths of the relationship that we can progress into with Jesus. Let’s consider a few of these:

Savior. When we first come to the Lord, we begin a relationship with Jesus as our Savior. We come to Him as helpless and hopeless sinners and Jesus rescues us and washes us in His own blood. A person who has been “saved” or “rescued” will always have a relationship of gratitude and thanks toward the person who saved them. Many Christians live in this relationship with Jesus and never really go any further. God is always calling us into a deeper relationship. Knowing Him as Savior is awesome, but He doesn’t want us to stay there.

Friend. Jesus brought His disciples into another stage of intimacy with Himself when He told them: “*You are my friends . . .*” (John 15:14). A good friend is someone you can share secrets with. It is a person unto whom you can pour out your problems. We visit friends and enjoy activities together with them. When we’re apart from our friends, we miss them. Good friends are irreplaceable. We have this friendship in Jesus. Jesus is a friend that “*sticks closer than a brother*” (Proverbs 18:24).

Nevertheless, there exists a limitation with this stage of relationship: friends are at our level. In other words, although friends may speak into our life, they have usually have no real authority over us. We still make decisions for ourself. For this reason, many Christians find that this relationship with Christ is as deep as they want to go. Yet the Lord continues to call us unto a deeper commitment.

Father. It is at this level where we allow the Lord to have authority over our life. This relationship goes deeper, and consequently, we find a greater security in our life as we surrender ourselves more and more into our Father’s loving hand. As a Father, He protects us, takes away fear, and provides for us. This is a wonderful relationship.

As we enter into this further stage of relationship with the Lord, something wonderful begins to happen. Just like we see a similarity of ourselves in our children, this same thing begins to happen with us – we begin to look more and more just like our Heavenly Father. The Bible says that we are changed from “*glory to glory into the same image by the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we grow in this relationship with the Lord, our very nature begins to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

Bridegroom. Moving deeper in our relationship with the Lord brings us into a Bride–Bridegroom experience. Now there is a different desire and longing in our hearts. A passion to please our Heavenly Bridegroom just because we love Him dearly. We are madly in love and literally lovesick for Jesus!

There is a courtship between Jesus and the Church. It is interesting to see how Paul writes to the believers of Ephesus about this “great mystery” of Christ and the Church (see Ephesians 5). In the city of Ephesus, a wealthy city full of idolatry, a mighty revival of Christianity had broken out. People had gotten saved, delivered, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Those new believers who had previously been involved in witchcraft, came and dumped all their books and items of witchcraft in one big pile and then they burned them, celebrating their freedom in Christ.

In Revelation 2, Jesus acknowledges that the Ephesians were working hard. In the Greek, the word Jesus used for “works” means “*to toil and labor fervently.*” The word that Jesus used for “labor” literally has the meaning of “*working to the point of pain.*” Jesus also acknowledged another beautiful characteristic of “patience” of the Ephesian church – their patience. In the original Greek language, this word for patience could also be translated as “*cheerful endurance.*” In other words, they were not simply gritting their teeth and trying to make it through the tough times, but rather, they were enduring the sufferings cheerfully. What an awesome description Jesus gave to the Ephesian church. We can only imagine how all of Houston would be transformed if such a church were located here!

Yet, in spite of all these compliments, in Revelation 2:4, Jesus has one very serious complaint with the believers in the Ephesian church:

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

Here the word “left” also has the meaning of “to disregard or to put aside as no longer important.” With all their wonderful characteristics, this one problem brought with it the threat of Jesus literally removing the “light” from that church!

In the Old Testament, the Israelites made a similar mistake. Jeremiah reveals God’s heart towards the Israelites in his message:

“Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.”

For Israel, they had “fallen in love” during their times of struggle in the wilderness. Many times it is only in the times of difficulty and trials where we fall in love with Jesus, but when God blesses us, like He did with Israel, we often “put aside” our first love. There is nothing wrong with having God bless us with material goods as long as those things don’t find a place in our heart and displace our love for the Lord.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him . . . the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15,17).

We must believe that God wants to prosper us and give us good things, but we must also take great care that these “good things” do not get inside of us and distract us from this intimate love relationship with our Heavenly Bridegroom. Let us always remember that we are just “passing through.” We need let our hearts be ravished with love for God. King David put it this way:

“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple” (Psalms 27:4).

Only one desire – to know and love God. The reason why the Ephesians began to lose its first love can be seen in the meaning of its name. The name of Ephesus means “desirable” – it was a very beautiful, desirable city. It was a center of idol worship and was literally one of the many wonders of the world at that time. Sadly, though, some of this natural desirability affected the hearts of these believers who were once “madly in love with Jesus!”

We need to watch over our desires. Some desires are good – eating, sleeping, affection for our spouse. These are all given by God. It is when we begin to seek after these things, rather than God, that we soon end up disregarding our first love. Jesus made a radical statement to those who wanted to follow Him as disciples:

“He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).

God is a jealous God and He wants all of our love to be centered and focused upon Him. There is a song written by Brian Doerksen called “Light the Fire.” Let’s allow this song to be our prayer today:

Don’t let my love grow cold. I’m calling out: “Light the fire again.”
Don’t let my vision die. I’m calling out: “Light the fire again.”

You know my heart, my deeds. I’m calling out: “Light the fire again.”
I need Your discipline. I’m calling out: “Light the fire again.”

I am here to buy gold, refined in the fire,
Naked and poor, wretched and blind. I come,
Clother me in white, so I won’t be ashamed.
Lord, light the fire again.

Holy Spirit, begin to burn new passion and love for Jesus. Bring us back to those “first works” once again. We want to be madly in love with Jesus! Amen.