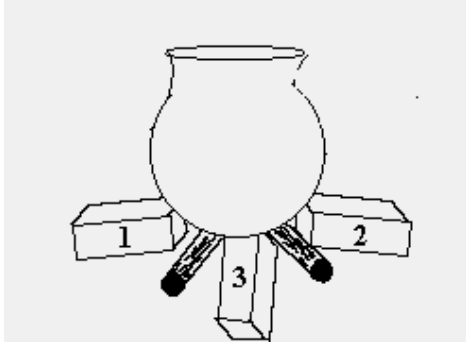


LOVING GOD WITH PASSION

The African fireplace.



- 3 - Pot balances well, hands free to cook.
- 2 - Poor balance, one hand to stabilise pot cooking from capsizing.
- 1 - No balance, both hands to stabilise, poor broth.

Keep this imagery in mind for I wish to use it as a picture to illustrate our love for God. How will I do that? Well come back to Rev 2, and the letter to the church at Ephesus.

The church at Ephesus was one of churches that Paul had started. Unlike many of the other churches Paul started, Ephesus had the additional privilege of being one of the few that Paul not only started - but that he also pastored for quite a long while - 3 years. He loved this church, and he poured his life into it. After he left them, continuing on his church-planting journey, he wrote them a letter, filled with hope and rich teaching. On his trip back to Jerusalem, he passed by there; and knowing that he may never see his friends, especially the Elders; he wept with them, telling them "I have taught you everything I know that could be of help to you."

After Paul left, the church was also pastored by Timothy; someone that Paul himself had trained into leadership - truly this was a double blessing.

But as though that were not enough, the church was triply blessed if what Christian tradition says is true, that after Timothy, the church was for many years under the oversight of the Apostle John - before he was banished to exile.

Such privileges! 3 great Christian leaders... surely this church was destined to become the jewel in the crown... and yet; instead of receiving a crown from the Lord, it was one of the 7 churches that received judgement! What went wrong?

The answer is in Rev 2. Note however that while the letter is a letter of judgement - it actually begins with 2 commendations and those commendations are 2 of our 3 fire place stones.

KNOWLEDGE

The first cooking stone is the stone of knowledge. Love begins with knowledge - indeed knowledge is the foundation of love for you cannot love that which you do not know. Its also why when you are falling in love you have such an insatiable desire to know about the other person - you want to know about their childhood, their past, their likes and dislikes, their feelings, their views. You want to know, know, know because knowledge is the foundation of love. Maybe one of the reasons why those of us who have been in love long are no longer giving. Whether it is love for God or love for a spouse, is because we think we now know it all - we no longer seek, we no longer probe; we no longer search.

God commended the Ephesians - for when it came to knowledge they had done well! This cooking stone was in place
vs 2 - "I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men; that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not AND HAVE FOUND THEM FALSE" and again in vs 6
"You have this in your favour: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

They know God, they knew his ways, what he likes and doesn't like, they were able to test false doctrine and to prove it false. When it came to knowledge and doctrine - they had it together.

DEEDS/OBEDIENCE

The 2nd stone, which they also had in place and for which they were also commended, was that their love was evident through their deeds. If knowledge is the foundation for love, then service and obedience are the fruit of love. How did Jesus show his love for his disciples? He washed their feet. How does he want us to show love for him?

John 14:23 "If anyone loves me - he will obey my commands."

In fact John goes on to say in 1 Jn 5:3 *"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome."*

When it came to obedience - the church in Ephesus had done well *Rev 2:2* “*I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary*”.

They had not only obeyed, they had also been faithful to persevere through difficult times without giving up! This 2nd stone of service was well in place.

PASSION

But it was the 3rd stone that was missing; and without it, the first 2 were not enough! “*Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love!*” What in the world could God possibly have meant? - “You have forsaken your first love”?

The best word to describe what they lacked, I believe is the word PASSION! Yes, they had their doctrine in place; yes, they were doing the right things; but they lacked zeal; they lacked passion. Their doctrine had become dry knowledge and their deeds a matter of routine. There was no passion, no feeling, no emotions anymore.

If you read the letter to the 7 churches in *Rev 2,3* - you would notice a pattern. Even though each letter is a letter of warning - only 2 churches are told they will be destroyed if they do not reform - the first and the last church - Ephesus and laodcea Pergamum - the 3rd church had a lot of heretic teaching; Thyatira was struggling with sexual immorality and idolatry, and Sardis was a lifeless church; but only to Ephesus and laodcea does he say I will destroy you. To Ephesus “I will remove your lampstand” - the lampstand being the heavenly symbol of the church; and to laodicea “I will spit you out of my mouth”. I will have nothing to do with you. What was wrong in these 2 churches? They thought they had true love, but their love was passionless!

What is passion?

What is passion? Passion is an intense desire, a strong affection and longing for

III - My first love

- Write psalms/songs
- Awe - pray prostrate
- Love walks

My passion for God had a childlikeness to it that caused it to overflow with joy and gratitude. I longed for God, I hungered for God, I pursued God. But now, I've lost it. Life has become too serious, too prim and proper and my faith has become colourless.

- I no longer lie prostrate on the ground in awe - God has become too familiar and suits cost too much to dry-clean.
- I no longer notice the heavens declaring the glory of the Lord - instead I grumble that is too hot or too cold, too dusty or too wet.
- I fall asleep when I pray and finding time for God's word is a real struggle.

“You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen!”

Why is passion so important?

Yes your doctrine may be right - you know a lot of truth; and your service may be right - you have been diligent and persevered, but without passion knowledge becomes dry doctrine; without passion service becomes duty. Passion turns dry into doctrine into exciting opportunities for discovery; and duty into an opportunity to joyfully express love.

Passion fuels knowledge into becoming the sweet fruit of joyful obedience. It is a daring force, a catalyst; and God delights in passionate love.

Now granted passion means different things to different people

- David - lot of music, dancing psalms, and time in the wilderness alone with God.
- Jesus - he wrote no music that we know of but his passionate love for God and for God's people come through. He talked about God every chance he got and there was a sense of wonder, power and majesty around him.
- Paul too was different - his passion comes through in the words he penned - when he talks about how deep, how wide, how great is the love of God; using expansive superlatives to express his obvious awe and devotion.

It's not so much how you express your passion - it's more “DO YOU HAVE A PASSION FOR GOD ANY MORE?” Does your heart long for God or does your walk with God feel like drudgery and duty?

How then do we recapture our passion?

Actually *Rev 2:5* tells us clearly where to begin

- a) Remember
- b) Repent
- c) Re-do

But this is only a beginning. Beyond these three, there is a world of discovery that awaits you, there is much that God wants to show you about loving him with passion, there is a new frontier of passion awaiting you as the Holy Spirit begins to delight you with his presence. Join me in this exciting journey of discovery - explore what it means to love God with passion.

CONCLUSION

- pray for people who long to love God with passion

Why repent?

We have forgotten grace and gone to works
we have therefore become proud