

Lampstands of The Last Days

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I think it's fair to say that South Africans, in general, are people who have learned always to make sure that things are charged.
- You know what I mean. Especially lights, rechargeable lights. I think most of us now have some kind of rechargeable light. And we make quite religiously a habit of making sure it's plugged in so that when load shedding hits, we can see.
- We can walk around and we can see. Now, overseas, in the first world, rechargeable lights are kind of an acute novelty. Here, they're a necessity, right? And recharging them, making sure that our rechargeable lights are ready to shine, is as important and as much of a daily habit for most South Africans as brushing our teeth or taking out the bin.
- It's a vital part of life to have our lights ready to go in South Africa. Well, the Bible tells us that in the last days, there will be darkness in this world.
- There will be moral corruption. There will be confusion. There will be evil. And the church, God's people in this world, are called to be the light.
- [1 : 2 1] We are called to be the ones who shine light into that darkness, who bring clarity to the confusion, who bring healing to the brokenness.
- But the question I want to start with this morning, I want us to consider as God's people, as the church, is how ready are we to be that light? How much have we charged ourselves to be ready to shine light, true God's light, into the darkness of the last days?
- That's really what this series is looking at. How can we prepare for the apocalypse? How can we be ready for the last days? But it's a very important question to ask because as we look in the book of Revelation, and we have studied the book of Revelation before.
- If you've been at St. Mark's for a while, you would have been with us as we looked through this very often confusing book of Revelation. But actually, if we study it properly and we work through it, which we did, it's very clear what it's saying.
- And one of the main things it's saying is that we are already in the last days. In fact, this whole age between the ascension of Christ and his return is the last days.
- [2 : 3 4] And these letters that we see at the beginning of the book of Revelation, often people skip the letters and go right into the juicy stuff with the dragons and the fire and the, you know, fire-breathing witnesses in Jerusalem and all that.
- But actually, these letters, there's a reason they're at the beginning of the book of Revelation. Because what they do is they teach us what we need to do as God's people in the last days to be effective.
- And to be a church that actually shines light into the darkness of this world. And what's amazing about these letters, we're going to be reading them over the next seven weeks.
- What's amazing about them is that as we read them, we soon realize they are not just letters to these seven individual churches at Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira.
- They are letters to all the churches who have followed those churches. Because they touch on issues that every church will have sooner or later in every age.

- [3 : 44] It's amazing how as we read these letters, they actually, they show us something about ourselves. And some of the issues that some of the churches have are more or less applicable, depending on what church they're read in and studied in.
- But throughout the ages, for the last 2,000 years, churches have found that these letters have done spiritual surgery to make sure that we are fully charged and ready to shine light in the darkness of the last days.
- And as we look at the first church today, the first letter, which is Revelation 2, 1 to 7, the letter to the church at Ephesus. That was kind of the main church.
- By the way, if you're interested, this would have been a circular letter, this whole letter of Revelation. And the order of the seven churches is pretty much the geographical order of a messenger carrying these letters would have traveled.
- And they're all in the location of modern-day Turkey. But as I said, they're not just for those churches. Because what we'll discover is they're for St. Mark's just as much as they're for the church of Ephesus.
- [4 : 50] But as we look at this first church in Ephesus, we're right away reminded of why it's so important to read these letters and take on board what they have to say to us.
- Because it starts by reminding us that we are lampstands in a dark world as churches. As Christians. We are lampstands in a dark world.
- And very soberingly, this letter warns us that if we don't listen carefully to what it has to say, we risk our light going out. And we don't want that to happen.
- And so let's listen carefully to what this letter says to us. As it reminds us that we are the lampstands of the last days.
- Look at verse 1 of Revelation chapter 2. Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. By the way, the angel, that Greek word is messenger. It could be referring to a supernatural being.
- [5 : 49] It could also be referring to the human leader of that church at the time. We don't know for sure. But it's a reminder as well that there are spiritual beings. And they have oversight.
- And they have direct interest in local churches. Anyway, it says, Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand.
- And who, notice this, walks among the seven golden lampstands. Each one of these letters will have a different part of the description of Christ that we read in Revelation chapter 1.
- That we were reminded of earlier. And this one to this church reminds us that he is the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands. That's symbolic, of course, because it's in Revelation.
- But it's a very important description. Look back at the end of Revelation 1. Just the verse before, at how it ends.
- [6 : 45] It says, The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Okay, so the lampstands in Revelation signify the churches.
- These individual local churches in each of these towns. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira. These are the little lampstands, according to Revelation, in those dark cities.
- But it's significant that we're described that way as Christians, as churches. Because it's not just saying that we are to be the light to the world. It is saying that, but it's saying something more.
- Because if we read that in light of what we've learned before in the Bible, we're reminded of Exodus. We've just covered Exodus. And there were lampstands in Exodus.

And they were quite important. So remember the lampstand that God commanded? This seven-headed lampstand, which was to be in the middle of the tabernacle, the holy place.

[7 : 44] And the priests were told, and God made a point of it, that they had to make sure these lamps always were burning. That the lamp was always on.

That the lights were always on in the tabernacle. And it wasn't just practical, so that they could see where they were going. It was symbolic. It was more than symbolic. It signified something spiritual that was going on in that space.

Because there, that tabernacle, we've learned in Exodus, I won't harp on about it, but it's so important. That tabernacle was the overlap between heaven and earth in that time. It was the place that God allowed His presence in heaven to be accessible on earth.

It was the place where heaven and earth overlapped. And that lamp was to burn as a continual reminder that God is here for the Israelites at that time.

That in this tabernacle, this is the place that God's heavenly presence has been made localized on earth. God is here. That was what the lampstand was meant to remind people of.

[8 : 50] Now, as we read through the Bible, we see that the tabernacle became the temple in Jerusalem. The temple and the tabernacle, we learn further, when Jesus came, were only ever pointing to Him.

All the Old Testament stuff we saw last week is fulfilled in Jesus. He is the presence of God, literally, on earth. He is the heavenly presence of God come down into our space. But then He, when He died, rose again and ascended, that went further in that He sent His Holy Spirit into His church, His people, the believers.

And we are now that presence. We are now that presence of God, that overlap between heaven and earth. God is here in His people, the body of Christ.

That's what the church is today. The presence of God. The church is not just a common interest group where people who are interested in the Bible come to learn a bit more about it. The church is the means through which God is making His presence known to this dark world.

And these letters that start with that reminder are written to local churches because local churches, like, that don't seem like much.

[10 : 04] These small local churches scattered all over the world. And I've done a bit of traveling in the world and what I had the great privilege of doing when I traveled was to visit Christians in the places I went.

from, like, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Paris, London, Edinburgh. And what amazed me is that there are Christians everywhere. They're in these small little communities just like this at St. Mark's.

And there's local churches scattered all over the world. And what we're reminded of here is that they are the places in the world God can be found. They are the places where heaven and earth connect, where the truth of heaven can be made known to the earth through the church and nowhere else.

That is what churches are here to do is to bring these truths that God has revealed in history to bear on the earth and to make these truths available to the rest of the world.

And not just to make these truths available, but to actually, through the Holy Spirit who empowers us, be the presence of Jesus in the world. It's an amazing thing that these small local churches are actually so important when we look at what God thinks.

[11 : 16] And the angels and heaven looks down and we are the center of God's plans in this world. We learned, again, last week. You know, to the city of Ephesus, which was a big and complex city, there were lots of stuff going on.

This little group of believers that this letter is written to was the presence of God in that city. You know, the next one, to the city in Smyrna, that little group of believers was the presence of God in Smyrna.

To the city of Pergamum, that little group of believers was the presence of God in Pergamum. And to the suburb of Plumstead, this is the presence of God.

To the people out there. It's quite a thought. That's the point that it's making here. It's not just written generally to the church.

It's written to these little gatherings of believers all over the place. They are the place where heaven and earth overlap. They are the presence of God. They are the lampstands. And not just here, but the places where the church is throughout the week.

[12 : 29] Because the church in the Bible is not the building. You should know that. The church is God's people. People who have submitted to Christ as their Lord and received His Holy Spirit. That church, where it is, Monday to Saturday, that is where the world can find God's presence.

That's where God's presence is. In the office, in the sports club, at school. Where God's people are. Where the church is. That is where heaven and earth overlap.

If you are a member of God's living church, have you ever thought of yourself like that? Hey? At school? You know?

When you go to school, boys and girls? At the office? At the sports club? You think you're only there to, you know, get some training and practice your sports. No, you're there to be the presence of God.

You're there to show people the truth and the values of God and how you live and speak. It's amazing, actually. And it's quite awe-inspiring that we have that privilege and responsibility in this world.

[13 : 34] We are to be lampstands in the darkness wherever we go as Christians. But how do we make sure we do that effectively? How do we make sure that that light doesn't flicker and go out like when you have that lamp that you forgot to recharge and load shedding hits and then you switch it on and it's just, man, forgot to recharge.

It's just this tiny little flicker and then it goes out after 10 minutes. We don't want to be that in the world, do we? But this letter to Ephesus says there's a very real risk that the lampstand is removed, that our light does go out.

So the question we need to answer this morning as Christians is how do we make sure from this letter that our light doesn't go out, that we can burn brightly in the darkness of the last days?

Well, there's two ways that we're told. Two main ways we make sure we can do that effectively. The first is we take the Bible seriously.

We take God's Word seriously. And that is exactly what the Ephesians were commended for. Have a look at verse 2 to 3. Jesus says to this local church in Ephesus, I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people.

[14 : 50] You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name and have not grown weary.

What encouraging words for this Ephesian church who are this minority in this very worldly pagan society to hear from Jesus that they haven't backed down.

They've persevered. And so they were commended for this. Notice that they were both commended for tolerating certain things and not tolerating other things.

To be an effective church, to be an effective Christian in the world, we need to know what to tolerate and what not to tolerate. And this letter really helps us to do that.

Especially in a world that's saying to us in today's society, tolerate everything. Everything must be tolerated. You can't be intolerant. Well, the Bible says, no, if you're going to shine the light, yes, there are certain things you must tolerate, but certain things you must not tolerate.

[16:03] And so we can see what those are. You do not tolerate evil. Look at verse 2 again. It's what Jesus commends them for. I know your works, your labor, your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people.

And that's not a weakness. That's a strength. Their lack of tolerating evil. In other words, they call sin what it is in the world, even though the world doesn't want to hear that.

An effective church, effective Christians are those who stand up, not rudely, not horribly, but they say, that is sin, that is evil. And we need to stand against it, even if the whole world is against us for it.

They don't tolerate evil. But also, look at the next thing. They don't tolerate people who manipulate God's Word. They do not tolerate that.

And you have tested those who call themselves apostles and or not, and you found them to be liars. And then verse 6, you also have this. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. We don't exactly know who the Nicolaitans were, but there were people who were teaching falsely from God's Word.

[17:14] There were this sect. And these Christians did not tolerate people misusing God's Word. People who, and that's what they were, these false apostles, these Christian sects of the time, were people who essentially took God's Word and made it say what they wanted it to say rather than what God says.

And so they were leading these followers who really wanted to hear about the Bible, but instead of telling them what God wanted to say to them, they used the Bible and manipulated it so that they could get the people to hear what they thought and what they said and used the Bible to make their points.

And they gained a following and they were very popular because they basically told people what their itching ears wanted to hear. And this happens all the time. It hasn't stopped.

It's not unique to the first century, right? You see it all over today. You just, it's so easy. Go to YouTube. Go to the cable TV channels and you will see the same thing going on.

You'll see people taking the Bible and making it say what they wanted to say rather than doing the work in discovering what is God saying through this. And you know what's alarming today, even 2,000 years later, Christians still tolerate that often.

[18:38] And they listen. And they go, oh, that's such a nice preacher. I love how he makes me feel. Or they carry on going to churches that are misusing Scripture because they like the music.

Or the decor. Or something really inconsequential like that. because it's vibey. That's, people choose churches based on those criteria often.

But this is telling us what the criteria is to use when we choose what church to go to. What makes a church effective in the last days is not that they're vibey or they attract a crowd.

But they're a church who takes the Bible seriously and they do not tolerate. blatant sin and they do not tolerate people misusing God's Word.

That should be your criteria in choosing churches. Not what makes me feel good, but what church takes the Bible seriously. What church, when I go there, helps me to understand what God is saying to me through this.

[19 : 50] Not what the preacher wants to say. Well, that's what the Ephesian church was doing well and they were commended for that. But they were also commended for what they did tolerate.

Do you know that Christians mustn't just be intolerant people all the time? There are certain things that we must tolerate. And we find out what they are in verse 3. I know that you have persevered and, literal reading, tolerated hardships for the sake of my name.

That's what they tolerated. That's what an effective church in this world tolerates is the hardship of being those irritating Christians who don't budge from the truth when society wants them to.

And they suffer for it and they're not liked for it and they're not popular for it. But they don't give in to that. They stand their ground because the truth is more important than what people think.

And they tolerate the hardships and they tolerate the suffering and they tolerate the ridicule and abuse. And they don't hit back. They take it because it's what Jesus did.

[21 : 00] It's what he calls us to do. As we've been seeing in 1 Peter our daily readings. And the fact that the Ephesian church did this is really commendable because Ephesus, if you look back in history, it was the key Roman city of the region in that time.

It was very cosmopolitan. It was a port city. Lots of trade coming through. You know what happens in port cities. All kinds of idolatry, sex, money. And there was pressure to compromise.

It was kind of like the New York of that region in the day. And there was just all this pressure from society to compromise. But this church, this little group of Christians in the city of Ephesus stood firm and they didn't compromise.

And they took on the cost of that from the society around them. So that's what they were commended for. And as we look at that and we consider the strength of this little Ephesian church, I think we can be really grateful that we at St. Mark's are part of a denomination that shares the same values as this little Ephesian church did, that Jesus commended them for.

While many denominations and many churches here and overseas have given in to the pressure to compromise, the pressure of the LGBTQ agenda, liberalism, where you ignore parts of the Bible and you cherry pick the Bible that's appropriate for the culture today because people don't want to hear the other parts.

[22 : 43] It's liberalism and not taking all of God's words seriously. We have not done that and I am so glad as a pastor that I can be part of a denomination that still values God's word.

And we're not scared of offending. We preach the whole counsel of scripture whether it is offensive or not. That is the value of our denomination of our church and we pray that it stays that way even though it's not popular and it doesn't draw crowds.

I mean there are many other churches right now that are packed to the rafters and people are feeling so good but are they hearing the Bible? See this is not the kind of church that the world wants.

The world wants a church that does good deeds in the world and shuts up and doesn't offend anyone. Now of course we must do good deeds but we do it because we know the truth and we make sure that truth is known whether or not people like it.

That is the kind of church Jesus wants and that's what we're reminded of here. We are to be a church not the kind of church the world wants but the kind of church Jesus wants one who takes the Bible seriously and we can be grateful we're in a church and a denomination like that and we must make sure that doesn't change.

[24 : 11] and yet that's not the end of the letter. There's a very big surprise in verse 4. Jesus reveals that's not enough.

It's not enough to take the Bible seriously. It's vital it's vital to do that it's absolutely essential to make sure we are taking the Bible seriously but it's not sufficient if we are to be lights in the darkness.

And that a lot of churches think it is. A lot of churches think as long as we take the Bible seriously and we're really firm in just teaching the Bible we're doing everything right but Jesus very surprisingly drops a big truth bomb here in verse 4 and says no that's not enough.

And it's a truth bomb for the Ephesians and for us today especially to Mark in reach South Africa because he says here in verse 4 despite all that they got right they got the major thing wrong which was love.

They forgot to love. Look at verse 4 but I have this against you you have abandoned the love you had at first.

[25 : 33] That's literally what he's saying some translations say your first love and it sounds like a soppy romantic movie but it actually it translates to the love you had at first the love you once had but don't have any more now and he says look at the warning if it's not fixed verse 5 he says remember how far you've fallen repent do the works you did at first otherwise this is the warning if they don't fix this I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place if they don't fix this love problem they can no longer be God's presence in the world and they can no longer be part of God's true church it's a serious warning and that's why this letter the first one of the seven is so shocking because it's it has all these commendations for this church that does so much right and yet it gets the main thing wrong and it's so serious because they can lose their lampstand so we've got to ask then what exactly is

Jesus talking about through John what is John writing about when he writes the love you had at first what exactly is that and if you read commentators or listen to different teachers on this passage they differ as to what what it is what is this love that the Ephesian church had at first that they don't have anymore some say it's it's their love for Jesus had the Ephesians lost their initial passion for Jesus and desire to share him with the world or some say it's their love for each other that they lost within the church you know Jesus says in John 13 34 you know it you don't have to turn there I give you a new command this is Jesus talking to his disciples love one another it's one of Jesus great commands to his people love one another as I have loved you you are to love one another in that way by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another that's not the only time

Jesus said it he emphasized this over and over again before his death resurrection and ascension he just wanted to make this point to his followers saying guys I love you and I'm going to show you but you need to love each other that's what's going to make you effective so was it that was it that that the Ephesians were lacking that they had it first living together as this family where they truly loved each other sacrificially and they shared their lives with each other maybe they weren't doing that anymore that maybe that's what what Jesus is referring to here or some others say that it's love for the neighbor love for the world around them maybe they become inward focused and they weren't actually involved in the needs of their society anymore doing works of charity and that as well is what the church is called to Matthew 5 16 Jesus says let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works he's talking about the works we do in the world out there and thus give glory to your father in heaven maybe that's what the

Ephesian church had stopped doing so which is it is their love for Jesus in sharing him with the world was it their love for each other in sharing their lives was it their love for their neighbor in be any of them or it could have been all of them the reason is because all of those come from the same source they come from the same place and what that is the thing that motivates Christians to love Jesus to love each other and to love the world genuinely deeply practically is when they have experienced the love of God for them when they've had a real transforming experience of God's love for them in the gospel let me read to you from 1 John 4 because he talks a lot about this you read you read

John's letters and John's gospel and John's revelation all written by the apostle John and look for love in those you'll be amazed how much this is a recurring theme in his letters listen to what he says and it's not just when he talks about love and when the Bible talks about love it's not the love of the world like we talk about love feelings bubbly feelings and feeling like we're flying on the clouds and being in love it's much deeper than that biblical love is the sacrificial decision that we make to love like Jesus loved us and we can only do that when we're empowered by having been loved like that by just listen to it or read it on the screen as I read it dear friends let us love one another because love is from God and everyone who loves has been born of

[31 : 00] God and knows God the one who does not love does not know God because God is love God's love was revealed among us in this way God sent his one and only son into the world so that we might live through him love consists in this not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins that there was the ultimate example of this heavenly love that John is talking about this totally undeserved gracious God setting his love on ugly sinners and then himself in the person of his son coming and dying to take on his own just punishment for their sins so that they can be saved and that they can have a hope of eternal life and that they can be saved from sin's power and penalty such was the love of God and that is heavenly love and you know what to be saved is to have had an experience of that love if you've never experienced

God's love in the gospel and you realize what Jesus has done for you then you are not saved you can you can call yourself a Christian you can come to church but if you've not had a real experience of the love of God in the cross of Jesus Christ and what happened there you are not truly saved being saved according to John here is having this experience of this love that transforms us and causes us then to radiate it out to the rest of the world so he goes on in verse 12 here in 1 John 4 no one has ever seen God but if we love one another God is in us and his love is made complete in us this is how we know that we remain in him he is in us and he has given us of his spirit what that's teaching is Christians true Christians are those who have received God's love understand and believe in the atonement of

Jesus for their sins and they realize that God in his grace when they didn't deserve it has saved them from their sins and has given them eternal life and they trust in Christ and then what they do is they radiate that out that love of God that they've experienced becomes in them life that's characterized by love it's an experience of God's love that absorbs it and then radiates it out like a here's an illustration that South Africans would appreciate like a brai coal you know coal in the brai you might use wood same difference but if you use charcoal you set it off with your fire lighter and then the fire lighter has the heat the charcoal is cold but then you see that it starts to absorb the heat of the fire lighter and then even when the fire lighter goes out the charcoal now has this heat inside of it and it starts to spread it to the other bits of charcoal maybe

I'm bored when I bribe it I like watching the charcoal spread its heat from one briquette to the other well that actually is a great description of a Christian who has absorbed and experienced the love of God it is now inside them and they they radiated out and they they radiated out in different ways that love inside them causes them to want to talk about Jesus to others 2nd Corinthians 5 Paul writes these words 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 11 and later on he says this therefore since we know the fear of the Lord we try to persuade people so he's saying listen we we are really trying to persuade people of the truth but then later on he says in verse 14 what it is that drives them to do that for the love of

Christ compels us the love of Christ compels us when you've experienced God's love in the gospel and it transforms you you want to share that to others so that they can experience that same amazing gracious unconditional love from their creator but not only do we love Jesus so that we want to share him we love our Christian family because you know Jesus said in John 13 as I have loved you now love one another this is how the world will know that you are my disciples when we experience Christ's love we radiate that out in our Christian family and that's how this group of people becomes a place where the light shines out because of how we love each other that's exactly what Jesus said would happen but also we love those in our society even who are not Christians who are broken and in need because we've experienced God's grace and we want them to experience it too so it radiates out and that's the way the

[36 : 22] Bible says an experience of God's love will radiate out of a Christian in sharing the gospel in loving their Christian family intensely and sacrificially and genuinely in loving the broken in the world but whichever of these it was for the Ephesians and it may have been all three they weren't doing it anymore their love had grown cold and this letter therefore reminds us that can happen for any Christian who was once on fire their love can grow cold and it often does especially when like this Ephesian church we are so focused on theological correctness that the gospel that once inflamed us has now become academic and now become a source of debate the finer points of theology is that what characterizes you as a

Christian maybe maybe you've missed the point maybe like the Ephesian church this gospel has become too academic for you and we get too familiar with the gospel as we go on in the Christian life we hear the gospel over and over again and sometimes it happens but we don't realize that it just becomes familiar and it doesn't transform us like it once did when we hear these truths when we send under sermons when we come to church maybe when you were first a Christian every sermon wasn't it like that when you first became a Christian and you went home and you just wanted to read the passage and you wanted to speak to everyone about it and you arrived at work and you were that irritating Christian who wanted to tell them about what you learned on Sunday maybe now it's just another sermon yes I know this yes okay are you maybe an Ephesian it can happen for any

Christian we get too familiar with the gospel and we stop experiencing God in these truths as we once did and so as a coal a little charcoal briquette that you take your tongs and you take it away from the rest of them and you put it on the side what happens loses its heat right that can happen to Christians who lose their connection with the love of God in the gospel that our love inside us can grow cold and that is what this letter is warning us about as Christians I wonder if that could describe you we need to ask ourselves that I wonder if this letter to the Ephesians describes us describes you maybe you don't talk about Jesus to others as you once did maybe you don't have a desire to be with Christians as you once did maybe church gatherings are not so much something you look forward to anymore as something I have to go to yes the church is doing this thing

I better go to it or you ask I'll go to that if I get something out of it rather than those are my people that's my family I love them I want to be with them maybe church gatherings aren't like that your family we've got a family event tonight a wonderful family event such a family celebration of some of our young people who are confirming their faith publicly but I wonder how many are maybe saying is it worth it what will I get out of it as opposed to it's my family those are my children of course I'll be there maybe maybe we're disconnected from each other because we're at home spend enough time together we've curated our lives comfortably especially Capetown we do that naturally we let only the people we want in instead of open the doors like

Jesus wants us to really love each other like a community do you know the names of the people around you maybe for you it's a lack of real concern for those in need in our world we hear about them but we're like again South Africans we've made a way of hardening ourselves to the needs of those around us that we see every day and therefore an unwillingness to sacrifice what we have to help last week if you were here we saw our brothers and sisters in Palestine at the moment dealing with the war in Israel our brothers and sisters followers of Jesus appealing to us help us help us we have all these Gazan refugees who the Israelis don't care about we are looking out for and we need your help churches in Cape Town we need your help to help us and that video that didn't go out to the whole denomination that was a message to us

[41 : 40] St. Mark's from Simon in Jerusalem and he said we need your help help and I know many people in this church who can help who have a little bit of extra money and they need whatever help they can but it's been a week not one person has come forward to me or Alan to say you know what I actually have something I can give I can help now maybe there's valid reasons for that okay times are tough maybe we just don't have maybe there's other ways we can help but also maybe maybe we really just don't care maybe we don't care enough to be made uncomfortable in our own lives to help those of our brothers and sisters who are in need 1 John 3 16 to 17 this is how we have come to know love he laid down his life for us we should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters if anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him how does

God's love reside in him it's a good question I don't think we're at all different to the Ephesians that this letter was written to I think this is a letter to St.

Mark's Plumstead we get a lot right and I hope that there's a lot about St. Mark's that Jesus commends but we mustn't let that cause us to ignore the ways that our love may have grown cold over the years but that's why we're given a remedy brothers and sisters in this same letter Jesus doesn't just drop this truth bomb he tells us how to fix it to ensure that it doesn't stay this way verse 5 revelation 2 verse 5 remember how far you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first there are two parts to this remedy that Jesus prescribes for St.

Mark's Plumstead two parts a change of mind repent repent and a change of action do a change of mind repent repent means realizing repent starts in the mind it's a realization and an admission of where our love has grown cold and it'll be different for each one of us as individuals you may have experienced the gospel and really experienced the love of Christ but over the time that you've been a Christian your love has grown cold in certain areas which may have been exposed this morning well repent means not to ignore that and to go home and go okay what am I having for lunch it's to actually go that's talking about me and it's to pray before you have lunch just go home in your room and go Lord thank you for speaking to me today this area or this area is where my love has grown cold it's repenting of it it's admitting it and it's a wanting to change saying to Jesus

I don't want to be like that I want to be the kind of person you saved me to be Lord Jesus and so it's a change of mind before change of behavior and it's a desire to really be a loving kind of person that that Jesus has died to save us to be but then it's not just that that's often where Christians stop and they go okay I'm sorry please help me to change okay what's for lunch there's a second step before we end and it's actually to change our behavior to make a decision to do the works you did at first think of the things you used to do when you were first a Christian that you don't do anymore and start doing them again it's very simple get get back to do get back even when you don't feel like it train yourself in those things that you did at first and you won't feel like it at first but you've got to just do them it's like running anybody want to get fit and you've tried running you want to get to that point where you feel like it right you want to be fit so that your body goes

[46 : 19] I want to run now but you start and you don't feel like that but in order to get there you need to just do it the first few times the first few weeks you just need to go for that run you're going to train yourself until the point where you naturally want to it's the same with love for sinners we don't as sinners right we don't naturally love we're sinners so love will automatically grow cold and so we've got to practice it we've got to train ourselves to do it until it becomes something that becomes more and more natural through the process of sanctification but it's not something that we have to feel before we do it in the bible love is a decision it's not a feeling feelings come later but it's a decision that we set ourselves to love I want to love Jesus so that I'm going to go tell people about him even though I don't feel like it and I'm scared I'm going to go to that evangelism course on the 11th on Saturday and I'm going to learn how to speak about him because

I know that's what I want to be a person who loves to speak about Jesus I'm going to go to that church event even though I don't feel like it and I don't think I'm going to get much out I want to train myself to be with my church family I want to go get involved in the social action project that the church is running because even though I don't feel like it and I actually must admit I don't I don't care about the people in need I just want to train myself to be more involved it's one of things I loved about cleaning up graffiti you know when Dylan helped us to go out and clean up graffiti and I was I don't feel like cleaning up graffiti that's someone else's mess but then when I went and did it what I realized is this actually trains me to be outward focused this trains me to put aside what I was going to do that day and do something that's going to help others and sometimes you just got to get into those habits before they become natural but it's all rooted remember in an experience of

God's love because it'll all just be unsustainable and just works based just ticking boxes if it's not rooted in a real genuine experience of God's love for you in the gospel have you had that have you had that have you experienced God's love in the gospel for you and maybe you have but it was long ago and you haven't recently had that experience again well then I encourage you Christian to spend your time in daily devotions to put aside other things and to spend this time with the Lord in prayer and in reading his word and letting that flow over you until it activates you again and spend your time listening to God's word preached to recapture again the depth of God's love for you if you're not feeling that you need to recapture that again so that your light doesn't go out but maybe as I'm saying that you realize you've never experienced that yet and you've never really been saved well then

I encourage you to find out what happened on the cross just find out what happened there when Jesus died for the sins of his people if you if you go on our YouTube channel and you go to the God course you can watch four episodes that we've made of just helping you to understand what happened in the gospel what happened on the cross come back sit under sermons embrace God's love for you embrace what he did what Jesus did on the cross to save you from your sins because he loves you and he doesn't want you to go to hell until you too can say what we sang earlier oh that rugged cross my salvation where your love poured out over me now my soul cries out hallelujah praise and honor unto thee if you can't say that yet genuinely then you need to embrace God's love for you on the cross you need to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus and receive his holy spirit so that you too can conquer the darkness of these last days as revelation 2 verse 7 this letter to the

Ephesians ends let anyone who has ears hear listen to what the spirit says to the churches to the one who conquers I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God let's pray O Lord God you call us to be light in the darkness we thank you for giving us truth even when it's not comfortable we thank you for teaching us that to be light it's not just about good teaching but it's about genuine love Lord this is something we needed to hear this morning and we pray Lord that you would help us to love you better to love each other better to love the world better so that we would be the lights in the darkness and that we would show the reality of the word we preach in Jesus name

[51 : 51] Amen