

The Jealousy of Jesus for Our First Love and Full Glory

I. THE INDESTRUCTIBLE FUTURE OF JESUS' INHERITANCE: A BRIDE MADE READY

To the Body of Christ in our day, Jesus is calling us to return to our *first love* (Rev. 2:4), which is the very opposite of being *lukewarm* (Rev. 3:16). Both of these passages, the bookends of Jesus' letters to the Churches, highlight the theme of *Jesus' zeal and commitment that His Church would walk in the first commandment, without hindrance*. He is jealous that we would carry the fundamental qualities of first love and that our love would be devoid of every touch of lukewarmness or indifference, but rather, burning and fervent, just as His own love. In an hour where the love of many will grow cold, Jesus will deliver His Church from the lukewarm spirit and into the holy lovesickness we see in the Bride at the end of the age (Matt. 24:12; Rev. 3:16, 22:17).

A. Jesus is Jealous for Our Full Glory as a Prepared Bride

1. The biblical story does not end with a fainting church but with the people of God knowing who they are and prepared as His Bride, wounded with consuming love for Jesus, and crying out for His return. (Rev. 19:7; 22:17). His Word promises that He will return to a bride who loves Him with a fervent and holy love (Eph. 5:27).
2. One of the most neglected truths in the hearts and minds of believers is the jealousy of Jesus the Bridegroom to bring forth His inheritance, His Bride, into the fullness of love and maturity (2 Cor. 11:2; Jas. 4:5). Jesus spared nothing to redeem His Bride and He spares nothing to keep us and mature us in holy love. He never starts a fire and walks away. He is committed to the flame of our affection (Is. 42:3). We were made for wholehearted love, and He refuses to relent in establishing that in us. Our destiny in Him as we partner with Him in grace is so glorious.
3. As the Bridegroom, Jesus calls us to a love that is perpetually passionate and set apart for Him. He refuses a lukewarm, indifferent, dull love. He gave all for the gut-level, loyal, joyfully abandoned love of His Bride, the Church. Calling for our deepest affections, He declared: *It's like a wedding! Don't make light of it!* (Mt. 22:5). *There will be a delay. Get oil* (Mt. 25:5). *I am the Bridegroom and I am going away. If you love Me, you'll live in the ache for Me and My return* (Mt. 9:15). *Return to your first love* (Rev. 2:4).

B. Jesus Calls us to Return to First Love

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. Rev. 2:4-5

1. I believe first love is the first commandment kept in first place in a present tense way. Scripture makes it clear that *first love* is not only a reference back to our own individual beginnings in Jesus but speaks of the *quality* of love God is after in His Church. The way the New Testament depicts this state of maturity of the church at the end of the age is that of *a bride made ready*, a bride in first love. The Body of Christ, no matter their individual ages or personal histories, will corporately carry the quintessential qualities of a betrothed bride, increasingly.
2. First love, with its distinctive qualities, was never meant to be *first love*, but *love*. And *love* is always to carry those primary attributes of openhearted trust, overflowing joy, and vibrant affections toward God. It is contagious exuberance of finding the One your heart loves, of discovering the treasure that for joy is worth selling everything for (Song. 3:4; Matt. 13:44-46).

II. REPENTING OF OUR UNBELIEF AND LUKEWARMNESS

A. Repenting of Disconnect from Jesus and Unbelief in His Promises

1. If we are honest, we can see the gap between our love now and the distinctive qualities of first love. The adversary makes his aim straight at the heart, and the threats to that love are countless along life's path. Confusion hits. Doubts assail. Unbelief hovers. Betrayals level. And the gravity weighs heavy upon us as the years and difficult circumstances unfold one by one. Without realizing it, what began as a heart-wide-open, fully abandoned responsiveness to Jesus can subtly wane over time. We can subtly quit fully believing and trusting Him.
2. It can feel like the command to keep first love is too hard of a burden to walk out. What about all we've walked through? What about the severity of the circumstances? Don't these give us a justification to not love with the same open-hearted trust, the same bold confidence, the same deep yearning as we did at first? These deductions—even when they're hidden from our understanding—expose our disconnect from Jesus and our unbelief in God's promises.
3. First love and the keeping of it is a war, with adversaries that must be overcome. We can fight hard against offense, against bitterness, against many culprits to love growing cold, and still lose heart because of the undercurrents of unbelief. If we begin to subtly believe Jesus is not as good as we'd thought, or that He no longer delights in us, we gradually lose our confidence in Him.
4. Not only is our interior confidence in Jesus goodness and affection constantly threatened, but our certainty of the future His Word declares. Jesus comes to us where we have lost our way in the delay, believing His answer to our prayers was no. In the testing and delay, we started filling our capacities with all the lesser things. And He comes and says, "*Will you still ask? Are you willing to keep asking, even after the testing?*" He longs for His people to endure testing and walk forward, believing, and continuing to cry out for His promises and purposes with full ache and desire.

B. Jesus Calls Us to Repent of the Lukewarmness Foreign to First Love

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.... So then, because you are lukewarm... I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich...and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev. 3:15-20)

1. Another adversary of fervent love is lukewarmness in our affection. Jesus is knocking on the door of His Church right now with tenderness and jealousy. He refuses even a trace of indifference, inward boredom with Him, or spiritual superficiality. He wants us to break soul-ties with self-sufficiency, responding fully to Him.
2. The opposite of lukewarmness is the lovesick heart, undergirded by fervent givenness to God. Lukewarmness arises when we answer our ache for God with duty or busyness, running from the place of gazing on His beauty.
3. We are invited to profound intimacy with the indwelling Trinity and know fullness of joy. This interior reality will be sufficient to withstand the onslaught of seduction and temptation at the end of the age. We are invited into the fellowship of the everlasting burnings, the fire of God's own love (Is. 33:14; Song. 8:6). This is our destiny, but it demands repentance from unbelief, apathy and worldly cares—embracing holy love.

III. OUR GLORY: A BRIDE IN LOYAL LOVE AND HOLY LOVESICKNESS FOR JESUS**A. The Voice of the Bride that Carries the Gold of Intimate Knowledge of Him**

The Lord is leading His Church into her glorious inheritance and future of loving as He loves and shining as He shines. From the most hate-filled and love-grown-cold atmosphere will simultaneously arise the voice of the Church, the Bride, that says, *“Let me tell you about My beloved, Jesus. My heart overflows with the good theme of the King’s beauty. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”* One in affection and blood-bought unity, from every tongue and tribe, together they will say: *You, Jesus, are our first love. Your love is better than wine. You are Chief among ten thousand. You are altogether lovely, Our Beloved, Our Friend. You are the One that we love. You are the King that we want.* (Ps. 45–2; Song. 1:2, 5:8–16)

B. A Unified, Holy Aching

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely. Rev. 22:17

In Revelation 22:17, at the close of the entire written Word of God, we see where we are headed, both individually and corporately—the finish line of where Jesus in His perfect leadership is shepherding every believer toward. We see a Church made ready with full love and full desire, in unity with the Holy Spirit, crying, “Come!” The Bride of Christ will want Jesus with all of her being, all of her affections – her inward capacities spread wide and enlarged in holy desire. Out of the substance of true relational knowledge of Him, will arise a lovesick, all-consuming, unified, desirous cry. This isn’t an uninformed desire. This isn’t a cry for only some aspects of Jesus. She knows whom she is asking the Father to send.

C. He Will Return to a Bride in First Love

Set Me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is as strong as death ... Its flames are flames of fire. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised. (Song. 8:6, 7)

1. In an hour of great emotional upheaval and trouble, the Church will thrive by His Spirit, anchored and abounding in unspeakable fellowship, comfort and joy in God. No matter the persecution or darkness, she will burn with a love that many waters cannot quench and floods cannot overcome—the very love of God (Song. 8:6, 7). Jesus, who overcame death and the grave with this Trinitarian love, will bring His Church into this same overcoming, everlasting, burning love of the Godhead. He is preparing us for Himself with a love that displays His passion and desire, thus, He puts within us His own inexorable love. (Eph. 5:27; Jn. 17:26).
2. Jesus’ eyes will search the earth, and no longer find His people passionless and indifferent, with divided affections. She will not be lured to sleep by the world. Rather, she will love with fiery and entire affection, just as His own love. She will long for Him with full, exclusive desire, beckoning Him to return. And He will answer that cry with His majestic appearing.