

Revelation 2:1-7 – Lost Love

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[0 : 00] Cool. All right. Well, good morning again from me. And excuse me, I'll address myself.

! Right? Weird. So good morning again from me. We are in God's Word this morning. And so if you have a Bible, would you open it?

And we are starting a seven-week kind of—it's not a series because we're going through Revelation, right? But it's a section of Revelation where Jesus is writing to the church. Now, if Jesus were to write a letter to us as a church, what do you think he might say?

What would be in your top list? Don't shout these out. Otherwise, there could be issues. But what do you think he would say? Just think about it for a moment before we launch into our text. Jesus himself is sending a message to us in Southampton.

And in that letter, he's highlighting some strengths. And he's also highlighting some weaknesses of our fellowship. What are those strengths? And what are those weaknesses? What do you think he would say?

[1 : 20] Well, in the same way that Jesus is writing to the church, he's writing to individuals in that church. And he's highlighting exactly the same things. If Jesus was to write you individually a letter, what things would he highlight as weaknesses? And what hard things would he highlight as strengths?

And that's important because as we go into this text, we're going to see that we see letters to seven churches that are in modern day Turkey.

They find themselves in that situation where Jesus is writing to them. And he is writing to churches, yes. But crucially, he's writing to individuals.

Because just have a look at how he structures these letters. Each letter begins with the phrase, to the angel of the church, and then ends with, he who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

And it's like, whoever is listening, listen up, is the phrase. So these letters are to churches, but we know that each church, as is true of our own church, is made up of individuals.

[2 : 36] And this is going to be significant because our church will never be something that you as an individual are not giving to.

It's not going to be something different than you are. So our church is made up of individuals. And the direction and temperature and movement and flow of our church is down to the individuals who make up that church.

And so we see in this first letter, the rebuke that Jesus gives against this church, this first church in Ephesus, is that they had lost their love.

Collectively, that is true. But it's only collectively true because it is individually true. And so this is helpful for us because as Jesus is penning this, he obviously understands that.

And for us to understand that is really important because it stops us from looking at these churches with a critical eye and forces us to look at our own individual lives and say, well, as one preacher used to say, what kind of church am I?

[3 : 58] What am I bringing to the church? Who am I bringing to the church? How am I making up the church? And so this message that goes to the church at Ephesus is to the church.

But it's also to the people who make up that church individually. It has personal application. And so it is collectively true, but individually true.

And so I say that as an opening to warn us to get ready for some testing things in these letters. These letters aren't for the church leadership team.

They are, but it's not only for them. It's for us. And the extent to which we are challenged and we repent, that the word repent appears in every single letter, will be the extent to we live out the purposes of God for us as a church.

And so as we open this first letter, we are challenged in this letter about the great commandment to love God. It's a great way to start, isn't it?

[5 : 08] Like if we wanted one thing to be more apparent and more obvious in our own lives, is that we would love God more. We would love God more and we would love God more deeply.

And so we're going to find that this great commandment to love God actually matters to God. Like that's a big thing to God. And our clearest and most critical obligation as Christians is to love God.

So look, this first one begins to the angel of the church in Ephesus write. Verse 1, chapter 2.

Now, I'm going to go through and I know it's going to be warm in here. And as soon as I start seeing people nod off, I'll wrap it up. That's not an invitation to start nodding off in the next five minutes.

Jenny, I saw that. So there's some technical things we just want to kind of like think about. But, you know, I really want to make these seven letters as practical as possible and a challenge for all of us as we walk through these letters together.

[6 : 17] But the first technical issue that we get to is who on earth is this angel? Okay? Because this is not like a normal thing. All right? The debate is, and there's four or five different views.

I'm not going to go into all of them. But the debate is who or what are the angels? Because the word angel is the Greek word angeloid. It can have the idea of an envoy or a messenger.

And it has multiple applications. So, for example, in Luke chapter 1, clearly the angel in that context is a supernatural angel.

It's a supernatural being. They exist. All right? So in that context, in Luke chapter 1, the angel is what we would say an angel. But in Luke chapter 9, the same word is used of a human messenger. And actually, Jude chapter 6 and 2 Peter chapter 2, it's used of evil spirits. So it's not easy just to go, oh, angel, I think I know what that means.

[7 : 17] Now, look, let me give you just a couple of thoughts. Number one, clearly, I think almost certainly these are not supernatural messengers from God in this context. The evidence in favor of that view goes something like this.

The term angeloid occurs 77 times in the book of Revelation. 69 times it's super clear that they are supernatural beings. Now, you might go, well, that solves it.

I mean, like, what else, whatever evidence would you need? The other eight times, they all appear in this phrase, the angel of the church. So 69 times of the other times that are not questionable are not questionable because they're clearly about supernatural beings.

So there's a pretty good argument for saying that Jesus is writing to a supernatural being at this point who is watching over the church at Ephesus. But there's big, big problems with that view.

And I was chatting to John last night about how you come to understand some of these issues. And sometimes you have to come down on the issue that is the least problematic.

[8 : 21] And so this view is probably one of the most problematic in that it presumes that Jesus is sending, and just picture this, that Jesus is sending a message to a heavenly being through John.

Now, that's a problem for a number of reasons, right? So Jesus has to send a message to an angel, supernatural being, through an earthly person so that it can reach earthly churches.

So Jesus is writing to John, who is somehow communicating the message to an angelic being.

John writes the angel to the church at Ephesus, and those angels are then to relay this message again to the church.

That's just unlikely. The second problem with that view is that angels are here, or the angel of the church is clearly rebuked for their sin. They are part and parcel of the problem.

They're not standing apart from the problem on looking in. In fact, the angel of the church, that phrase, of the church, is a technical term to mean that they belong there. So that's a problem.

[9 : 31] Look at verse 4. He says, I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love that you had at first. So unfallen angels don't sin, neither do they need to repent.

So that view causes probably more problems than answers. And you find that if you do any kind of, any technical kind of work with, you know, the Bible, and understanding what the Bible is trying to say, is sometimes you just come to the point where you go, well, this one's the least problematic, right?

And probably the one that's least problematic, the best way to see angeloid is to see them as human messengers, probably people carrying some kind of apostolic authority, and they're going to visit each of these churches with the message.

Whilst that in itself carries some problems, for example, the term of the church again, same problem that we had with the supernatural beings, it is probably still the best fit out of all of the other possibilities.

And so the person who fits that profile, so a person who's not an apostle but carries some apostolic authority to the church, is a person we know was at Ephesus with apostolic authority was Paul's friend, Timothy.

[10:55] And so it's highly likely that John or Jesus is sending a message to Timothy via John. And so in reality, we don't have just two letters to Timothy, first and second Timothy, we probably have a third, this potentially being the third.

So he's writing to the city in Ephesus. Now let me just give you a little bit of background into the city of Ephesus.

You know that the city of Ephesus had this massive temple in it, the temple of Artemis, and it was known as the seven wonders of the ancient world. We know from the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 19, that there was a man named Demetrius who was selling silver shrines of Artemis.

And the gospel came to Ephesus. And this is just a great testimony of the gospel's work. But the gospel came to Ephesus, and Demetrius nearly went bankrupt because people stopped buying the shrines and turned to Jesus instead.

And there was a riot that took place. And so this place is known for its worship of Artemis. It was a church founded by a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla. It was ministered to by the powerful preacher Apollo.

[12:04] And Paul himself lived there for three years. Paul wrote a letter to them from prison in Rome, and quite possibly visited there again after his release.

And it was from this church that Paul called the elders, as he was on his final missionary journey, from Miletus to meet him in... He called to them from Ephesus to meet him in Miletus as he was on his way to Jerusalem.

Later in the first century, the writer of this book, the Apostle John, would find his home in Ephesus. So there's some interesting kind of stuff going on in the background that John is writing to a church that he would find himself later ministering in after being released from Patmos.

So this church is one of the central churches in first century Christianity. And that makes the rebuke, that makes the letter that comes from Jesus even more weighty, that this church has lost its first love.

If that church can lose its first love, do you think it's possible for other churches to lose their first love too? With all their history, with all the people that have come through, with John himself later ending up there.

[13:33] So Jesus is writing to them, and here's the first thing he reminds them. And this is so gracious of the Lord. He says, the words of him, that is Jesus, the words of Jesus, who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

So again, this comes from the first chapter. And what Jesus is doing is that he is saying, look guys, I know that you have problems in your church. And the answer to that problem is me.

So he presents himself as the solution to the needs of the problems in that church. The greatest need, and you want to write this down and remember it, the greatest need of the local church and of us individually is not to be more impressive by worldly standards.

The greatest need of the local church is to know Jesus and to be faithful to him. That's our need. And that's why Jesus presents himself like this.

He says, I am walking amongst you. I'm not distant from you. I'm not sat down. I'm active. I'm at work. I'm making my presence known.

[14:50] Remember that. And so this is God's grace to them as he says, I know that there's weaknesses that you have, but I'm here to fulfill those weaknesses.

I'm here to help you in your weaknesses. And so he says then in verse two, I know your works. And in all seven letters, Jesus says, I know your works.

Hebrews chapter six, verse 10. The writer says this, that God is not unjust so as to overlook your work. Do you ever feel like that? Like that no one ever sees the good that you do.

No one ever sees you serving. No one ever sees the stuff that you do in the background. No one ever sees, because you guys don't blow a trumpet about it. Like you just, I know that you guys just crack on and you just do stuff for the Lord.

And, but sometimes it can be frustrating, can't it? Our old man, our fleshly ways kind of rear its ugly head sometimes and kind of says, well, no one's noticing anything you do.

[15 : 48] What's the point? Why don't you just give up? Well, the writer to Hebrews says, God is not unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

So Jesus says, I know your works. He says, I know your toil and your patient endurance. Toil and patient endurance should never go in the same sentence in my mind.

Toil and patient endurance. So the sort of pattern that Jesus uses is to commend them for what they are doing. I know your works. I know your toil and I know your patient endurance.

I dare say that we could learn a thing or two about that, couldn't we? About coming to the church and seeing the good that the church is doing and commending them, commending each other for the good things that you see in each other.

And so here he lists two things. He lists their toil and their patient endurance.

[16 : 54] So there is the outward activity of labor and then there is the inward character of patience. And then the rest of verse two tells us what toil looks like and verse three tells us what patient endurance looks like.

And so hang fast for some encouragement, right? This is what real labor looks like and this is what real endurance looks like.

He says, how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false. That is the Bible's definition of hard labor.

Their work, their toil, their labor includes the incapability of putting up with bad people.

Now I don't know whether you or how you find yourself with that, how you put up with bad people.

Do you just let things go?

[18 : 04] Do you just pass it by? Maybe something's on the TV. Do you reach for the remote or do you just let it pass by? The conversation that's going on in the office, do you let it pass by or do you remove yourself?

The commendation from Jesus is, I know your work's your toil. Let me give you a definition of toil.

You can't put up with bad people. You don't consider them that you just let that go.

And actually the word evil here, before we jump to too many conclusions, the word evil here means worthless. Now I know, it's like, how dare you say that I'm worthless? Well look, in the first century, worthless means something different than what we would probably describe worthless as.

Worthless means that you don't match up to the call of God on your life. That's what worthless means. You're out of balance. You're out of sync.

You're out of, you know, you're not walking that way, so then you are worthless. Jesus used this word in Matthew 21 for lazy servants.

[19 : 17] Now think about that. A lazy servant. Like they don't exist. You are either a servant or you're lazy.

You can't be a lazy servant. Right? So Jesus uses that word, they're worthless. A servant who is lazy is not doing what they should be doing, i.e. serving.

And so this is a church that has a church-wide intolerance of people who aren't living the lives that they should be.

So this isn't talking about just that stuff that goes on in the outside world. This is about you and I.

This is about us. This is about the people that we sit next to, the people that we invite over.

This is us. And Jesus is saying that they have an intolerance for people who are not walking the God-ordained purpose for their life.

[20 : 22] And so the application for us is that we should discover what God has intended for us to do and walk in it so that we are not worthless. And when our friends, our brothers and sisters in the Lord are not walking in the way that God has for us, we do not tolerate that.

We come alongside them and we put our arms around them and we say, this is the way, walk in it. So there was this discipleship of intolerance going on in the church.

The word bear there in our verse is the Greek word *bastazo*, which means to carry.

So it sees, this church sees those who are worthless, so it sees those who are evil, those who are not living the life they were designed to or blessed to live, it sees them as a burden that need to be thrown off.

The church had refused to allow worthless people to continue being worthless. Isn't that a great thing?

[21 : 35] There's just not an intolerance for people to live average lives. There's not a tolerance for people to just kind of get going and get into like a mechanical swing of going to work and family and all of that and just kind of living their days out.

There was an intolerance of that kind of attitude. Jesus says of them that they had tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars.

I wonder practically what that looks like. Because we have an example actually of evil spirits doing this. Should we look at it real quick?

Evil spirits tested the apostles. Did you know that? If you go through the first century, if you go through the book of Acts, you find an occasion actually in Ephesus, ironically, where evil spirits tested someone who said, I'm an apostle.

And what we find is, it was in Ephesus, and what we find the story was that some itinerant Jewish exorcists had seen the apostles working and how they were able to exercise these demons.

[22 : 48] And they were like, I want some of that power. And so, they took it on themselves to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know Jesus, right? But they were like, the power is in that name.

So, they went out and they started calling the name of the Lord Jesus on those who are demon-possessed. And they said, we exercise you in by the name of Jesus who Paul preaches. Do you remember that? And they said, the evil spirits, the evil spirits heard it and they answered. And like, that would be enough for me to start running, right?

Like, I'm done. Right? They heard it and they answered and the evil spirits said, Jesus we know. Paul we know.

Who are you? And the man with the evil spirit were told, leapt on them and beat them up and they had to run away through the city naked.

[23 : 50] That's how evil spirits test those who have, say they have authority and do not. Now, I'm not suggesting that we do that. Like, you know, like apostles come out, I'm an apostle and we just beat them up and strip them of their clothes and go, we'll start running.

I'm not suggesting that we do that. These false apostles were probably a group of itinerant Nicolaitan missionaries who followed a guy called Nicholas of Antioch who was one of the original seven deacons.

and they're referred to in verse six but they were a sect of either Judaism or Christianity who believed basically in a priestly hierarchy.

So, they said that only certain people were able to hear from God and if you really wanted to hear from God, you had to go to them. If you wanted your sins forgiven, you had to go to them.

If you wanted, if God had a message for you, you had to go to them. And so, look, the first thing that Jesus commends them for is holding fast to and toiling after genuine faith.

[24 : 59] That's what this church is known for. Genuine faith. Living that genuine faith out. Being intolerant of anything that looks average or mediocre or worldly.

They toiled after that. And in verse three, tells us what patient endurance looks like, which is the second thing that Jesus commends them for.

He says, I know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my namesake and that you have not grown weary. And simply what that means is that you don't quit when you get tired.

You don't give up when you get tired. You don't give up when it gets tough. Like, I'm not going to ask you to show your hands, but I bet all of us have felt the temptation from time to time when things get tough, when things get hard, that we want to quit.

Either doing what we're doing or sometimes even we just quit on God. And we're just like, no one ever told me it was going to be this difficult. I'm gone.

[26 : 14] But it's interesting that God always, listen, God always acknowledges workers. Always. And he even looks for workers. So this is linked to the toil, right?

He always looks for them. Why? So that he can work through them. Like, if you're not a worker, if you don't have a mind to work, don't expect a call from God.

God is not looking for people who are sat on the couch eating Doritos watching movies. Now, there's nothing wrong, well, eating Doritos is clearly everything wrong with that, but there's nothing wrong with watching movies.

But if that's your flow, if that's what you do, and you're not known for a worker, God has your number, but he's not going to use it. And I know that because the flow of scripture tells us that. Moses, he was a shepherd out in the desert. You think it's hot today? Go out to the desert and watch sheep for a living. And what did God do?

[27 : 21] He called him. Gideon. What was Gideon doing? He was threshing wheat in a cave. I've never threshed wheat, and I've never threshed wheat in a cave.

I am assuming both are really difficult. He was a worker. David was a shepherd. He was called. Elijah was working in the fields. What were the disciples doing?

They were mending nets. Levi, when he was called, what was he doing? He was counting coins. They were working. It was always in the act of them working that God found them.

He didn't find them sitting on a couch, call them and say, it's time to start. No, he found them already doing stuff, and what did he do? He just changed their direction.

In fact, that word bearing up in verse three is the same word as bearing in verse two. So you have this idea that they cannot bear those who aren't genuine, but you have carried, you aren't burden free.

[28 : 30] So you could say that this church was engaged in slavish toil, and this is the word to the point of exhaustion, and they endured with patient, long-suffering every burden that they encountered.

What a thing. Wouldn't you like Jesus to say that about us? But we wouldn't like him to say the next thing.

Verse four starts with the word but. I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love that you had at first. That phrase gives special attention to that word first.

You have left your love, at least the love of your first days. And the idea is that the Ephesians had left or departed from the act for which they were personally responsible.

so this idea of worthlessness is within this. You have this great command to love God and now you have become worthless.

[29 : 37] Why? You're not following after that great command. Jesus says, you cannot bear those who are evil. That evil referred to a lazy servant, someone who had a responsibility but didn't carry it out so became worthless.

It's the same idea. The Ephesians were blessed with the responsibility to love God and display the love of God and they'd moved away from that position of devotion.

The labor gradually came to be merely mechanical. within 40 years of the letter written by Paul to them, Ephesus had become a machine without fuel on autopilot.

The things that they were responsible to do, the things that the Savior blessed them with doing, they weren't doing. And maybe this is how some of us feel right now.

perhaps you're kind of just trudging through, hanging on, doing your duty. And so perhaps for us this means that knowing God and being a Christian involves a heart response more than it does a head response.

[30 : 57] It requires love. In fact, John wrote these words in John 14. Jesus said, whoever has my commands and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my father. And I will love him and I will manifest myself to him. Jesus wanting to identify Peter's spiritual condition, what did he ask?

After Peter fell, what did Jesus ask Peter? He says, Peter, do you love me? Not, not, Peter, have you served me today? Not, Peter, have you signed up to the rota this week?

And like, we need rotas, I get that, I'm not going to go off on a tangent and like, hammer on that. The question was, Peter, do you love me?

Christians love Jesus. Do you love him? Oh, I know that we can say that his teachings have profoundly changed our thinking.

[32 : 05] We can say that. We can say that we are now living maybe a more moral and ethical life, the kind of life that maybe Jesus would want us to live.

but do you love him? The first and great command has become the last and least in the Ephesian church. Like Martha, they became so busy at working for Christ that they had no time for Christ.

When the Lord appointed the twelve disciples, it's interesting, it is significant, Mark tells us in Mark chapter 3 that Jesus appointed them for two reasons. Do you know what those reasons are?

Number one, so that they might be with him.

Number two, so that he might send them out. Don't ignore that order. The first purpose was fellowship with Jesus and that enabled them to go out.

Their ministry in the world was a product of that fellowship. But Jesus looks at this church and perhaps he's looking at us this morning and perhaps he's looking at me this morning, perhaps he's looking at you this morning and he sees all of the great things that we are doing and he asks, what about me?

[33 : 23] Listen, here is grace because the one who is walking in the midst of the church sees what was missing, sees what was missing and he presents three steps to regaining love.

See, do you want to know what you can do today, tomorrow, this week, next week, next month to regain love. So verse five, so verse four is missing from the letter that Jesus will send you.

He says, firstly, verse five, remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. It is possible, and we know this, our hearts agree to this, it is possible to slip away gradually without realizing what has happened, isn't it?

And a useful counter to that is to go back in thought to your first days. To get out those old, for some of you, it will be tape recordings of worship songs.

Some of you might even be vinyl. Some of you might even be before that. and stick it on the car.

[34 : 48] And I bet you know the words still. Go back to those first verses that the Lord spoke to you so profoundly about. To go to those places, to take time, to remember.

The Greek imperative actually is present. It's not just to do that once, but to keep on remembering, to hold in your memory. They had at one point enjoyed a close walk with God.

And everybody knew it. Everybody's like, you're different. What's happened to you? And you freely talked about Jesus. Without embarrassment, without shame, without fear of someone going, well, maybe I'm not going to get invited to that party.

And Jesus says, let your minds dwell on that. Let your mind dwell on that close walk that you once had with God. How it used to be when you got up in the morning, it was like Jesus was sat there with you, with your Bible and your coffee, and he just spoke to you.

Just remember that. Hold it in your memory. Then secondly, repent. Jesus in every letter is going to tell us to repent. Repentance is not only for non-Christians.

[36 : 22] Right? Repent. In fact, I think sometimes the actual definition of being a Christian should be someone who is repenting. Like, it's just a day-to-day, onward, everyday experience, isn't it?

So he says repent. Someone once said that Christians should never dally with wrong. If you are wrong, be quick to own it.

Be quick to seek reconciliation with the Lord. Be quick to repent. Be quick to change your mind. And as Christianity is not basically negative, the third step, do the works that you did at first.

Do the works that you did at first. Don't just think about it. Do it. Don't just think about those good times. Relive those good times.

Bring those good times back. This is a wonderful promise from the Lord to say, I have not forgotten. I have not forsaken you. You may have walked away from me, but I'm right here.

[37 : 37] I'm walking amongst you. He says, if not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. Listen, a church can only continue for so long on a loveless course.

Without love, it ceases to be a church. Without love, we cease to be Christian. Jesus doesn't leave them in a state of despair, but he gives them three steps to returning to love of their first days.

Then he says in verse 6, yet this you have. You hate the work of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate, which is actually just a repetition of verse 2.

Then he says, he who has, and this is whoever hears this, whoever hears, have you heard this? Have you heard this from the Lord today?

Whoever hears this, let him hear. Why? Because it's the Spirit speaking. Isn't that a crazy way to kind of redefine that verse?

[38 : 38] Whoever hears it, let him hear what God is saying, what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches, the plural churches. Shows that the message is not just for the Christians in Turkey, but for everyone who has an ear.

Then, as a pattern, in each of the letters, there is this little message of encouragement. to those who overcome. So, to the one who overcomes or the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

Now, look, the idea of an overcomer or a conqueror, you might say, well, I don't feel like much of an overcomer or a conqueror. right? Like, at the end of a long week, kids are going nuts, husband's not doing much, you just want to flake out warm temperature, some of you are nodding, yes.

Like, I don't feel much like a conqueror, I don't feel much like an overcomer, and yet, the idea of the overcomer or the conqueror is best understood as a general description of a Christian.

You are a conqueror, you are an overcomer. Now, that's not like, like, prosperity gospel stuff, I know some of you are like, I heard Joel say that once, no, I'm like, this is biblical, right?

[40 : 16] Paul, in his letter to the church of Rome, had something special to say about conquerors, linking it to the love of Jesus. Here's what he said, Romans chapter 8, he said, in all these things, we are more than conquerors, not just a bulk, standard, everyday, mediocre, average conqueror, more than a conqueror, how?

Through him who loved us. In these things, well, what things? Well, in the things that previously Paul had listed, a whole series of things that might lead us to believe that we are less than conquerors.

I bet if I was to ask you individually, how do you feel? Do you feel like a conqueror today? Do you feel like you're winning? Do you feel like an overcomer? Most of us would go, well, not really, if you're really honest.

Well, Paul says, in all of these things, all of these things that will tempt us to think that we're not conquering or overcoming, he says, in all of those things, in all of those things, we are more than conquerors.

These things that force us sometimes to think that we are in fact not overcomers, but actually spiritual failures. Have you been there? Have you heard that voice call you a spiritual failure?

[41 : 33] And so he lists them. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. These things might cause us to give up on God.

Why? Because we don't feel like we're overcoming. We don't feel like we're conquering. We actually feel like we're failing. Like tribulation, when tribulation comes, when hardship comes, causes you to lose sight of God and his care and his love for you.

That word distress means a narrow place. You know that place. You've been in that place. You know that place, the kind of place you find yourself when there just doesn't seem a way out.

And the only way out is the one that you don't want to take. Like you have no other options apart from that way. That's called the narrow place or it's called distress. And it can be so traumatic sometimes it might cause you to say, God, I can't continue, I'm done.

persecution. That word means to run away. Ever run away? I've run away. I mean mainly, well, in pre-Christian times, the police and dogs.

[42 : 45] But I've run away. I've wanted to run away. Sometimes you want to hide, don't you? Does that sound like an overcomer? Somebody wants to run away?

Like Abraham, what did he? He ran away to Egypt, didn't he? Told Pharaoh, his wife was his sister. That's running away. And yet, Abraham's called an overcomer.

He's called a conqueror. Paul says, in all of these things, what about when your body is just in agony because it's just burnt out? You don't have any physical capacity. When you're exposed, when God finds out all about you and people around you find out that you're a fake and a fraud and you're totally naked and totally transparent and you're just filled with shame, that kind of exposure brings.

How can you, how can I be labeled a conqueror? Paul says, in these things, in these things, not in the opposite of those things, not in the green pastures, not in the beautiful valleys, not in those places where the river runs deep, but in the places of hardship.

In those places, we are conquerors. How on earth? Paul says, that is, it is through him who is sharp sharp Thank you.

[45 : 00] Thank you.

To go back to, thanks Jeff, to go back to an experience that is outside of our time. For us to trust in what is written, to look at the lives of dead people who have gone before us and go, well, God was faithful to them.

Look at Abraham. If God is faithful to Abraham, surely he can be faithful to us. In fact, it doesn't stop at Abraham, does it?

Because even Abraham can go, well, look back, go back further in his own existence, right back to the Garden of Eden where man was created. And then the following day after man was created, what happened?

God gave him a Sabbath. God gave him a Sabbath. Designed to be a day of fellowship with the Lord. A day of devotion to the Lord. A day of love with the Lord.

[46 : 24] And so they had left this. And so Jesus says, you've fallen. Just like Adam has fallen. You've fallen. You've fallen out of fellowship.

You've fallen out of love. You've fallen out of devotion. But despite the fall, here's the promise. He wants you to take a walk with him. And enjoy him.

And so may the Lord help us. Heed these words to this church in Ephesus. To this church in Southampton. And even to our own hearts today. Father, we thank you for your word.

Lord, we thank you, Lord, that you promised never to leave us nor forsake us. Lord, would you help us today to rekindle that love of our first days.

Help us to remember. Lord, help us to repent. And help us to do again. Lord, we want to serve you. Walk with you.

[47 : 24] Lord, not out of duty, but out of love. Because you first loved us. Lord, would you remind us of your great love for us today. Lord, that we are overcomers and conquerors.

Not because of our own efforts. But because of your goodness. Because of your grace. Because of your mercy. Because you first loved us. Lord, we praise you this morning. Lord, we want to thank you, Lord, for this letter.

Lord, some great things. Some hard things. Lord, would we take them to heart today. Lord, would we be serious. About this first and great commandment to love God. Lord, help us to do that.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we're coming to the end of our service.

So please do stay for drinks if you can. Just stay for some fellowship. We've got plenty of time this morning to just meet with each other.

[48 : 27] So let's just have a final prayer as we end our service. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power.