

7. The dead church

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In 549 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia had come to Sardis, and found the position of the city which is 800 ft above sea level ideally suited for defense. There seemed to be no way to scale the steep cliff walls that surrounded the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city.

One soldier studied the problem carefully. As he looked, he saw a Sardis' soldier dropped his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops up it that night. When they easily scaled the cliffs, and came to the actual city walls, they found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defenses of their city, that they felt no need to keep a diligent watch. So the city was easily conquered.

Curiously, the same thing happened almost 200 years later, 214 B.C., when Antiochus the Great from Syria attacked and conquered this overconfident city by the same method.

Because the people inside of the walls of Sardis depended on their natural defense system, they didn't set up the guards around the walls and they had false sense of security. The stiff cliff and the walls around the city made them to think that they would be safe forever from any danger.

Religion is like that. Some people think that I am religious. When I hear that kind of comment, I usually correct them by saying, "I am not religious. I believe in Jesus Christ who is my God and Savior." Some look at me with that look, "Yeah, what-e-v-e-r!" Some ask me about the difference between religion and Christianity.

Millions people depend on the security and power of the religions. They think that through their religions, they are going to achieve their enlightenment realm of heaven which they created in their minds. That is like if I start to believe hard enough that I'm going to be on the moon tonight, I will be there. I can believe however I want, but the fact is that I don't have any capability to be on the surface of the moon by tonight.

Religion gives false sense of security. Without the truth from the Word of God, there is no religion that leads people to true salvation and peace in God.

A. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF SARDIS FROM JESUS

Rev. 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

Ancient Sardis, the capital of Lydia, was one of the most important cities in Asia Minor. It was located about fifty miles east of Ephesus and about thirty miles south of Thyatira at the junction of five main roads. So it was a center for trade. It was also a military center, for it was located on an almost inaccessible plateau as we already found out.

The main religion in the city was the worship of Artemis, also known as "Diana" Roman goddess of fertility which encouraged sexual immorality as a practice of worship of this false goddess.

Another notable thing is that the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor was from Sardis. Sardis was the place where modern money was born. The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of Sardis notoriously soft and pleasure loving. It sounds like ancient Las Vegas to me.

Some people get confused, because the v1 says, "He who has the seven Spirits of God." There is only one Holy Spirit, but the number seven demonstrates fullness and completeness in the Bible. The Holy Spirit gives life to the church, and life is exactly what the people at Sardis needed desperately.

A charismatic preacher Benny Hynn once claimed that there are 9 persons in Trinity. After he was asked for biblical references to claim that kind of outrageous statement, he said that he heard it from somebody. Since it was a new thing, he repeated it without checking against the Bible. Then, he backed off from that comments. There are no nine persons in Trinity, nor actual seven spirits in God. It means His fullness and completeness.

All of the church's man-made programs can never bring life, any more than a circus can resurrect a dead body. The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost, and its life comes from the Spirit. When the Spirit is grieved, the church begins to lose life and power. When sin is confessed and church members get right with God and with each other, then the Spirit infuses new life which starts a revival!

B. COMMENDATION

There are no words of commendation from Jesus to the believers at Sardis. Neither is there any mention of opposition or persecution. The church would have been better off had there been some suffering, for it had grown comfortable and content and was living on its past reputation. Like the city itself, the church at Sardis gloried in past splendor, but ignored present decay.

A great example can be found the current churches of England. There used to be some awesome Spirit filled preachers and churches in yesteryear, such as Charles Spurgeon, John Wycliffe, John Knox, John Wesley and many more. What happen to England? You still see majestic cathedrals but they are literally empty. Less than 2% of the Great Britain population claims to be born-again.

The non-believers in Sardis saw the church as a respectable group of people who were neither dangerous nor desirable. They were decent people with a dying witness and a decaying ministry. Even the devil didn't want to do anything against this dead church, because it was no threat to him.

Last week you thought I was after Catholic. This week I am going to talk about some of the main Protestant denominations that are living on their past glory and staying away from the truth of Christianity.

Majority of Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, American Baptist and Congregationalist churches in America embrace everything from homosexuality to environmental issues except the truth from the Bible. They don't want to see the Bible as the Word of God with the final authority. They believe that they should be more sensitive to current political and social issues. They are living in their past glory and they are dying inside. If you don't believe me, check out their denomination

web sites. You won't find messages of salvation through Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice.

C. REBUKE

Rev. 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

The works by the church of Sardis haven't measured up to God's standard. Jesus' command to reverse their attitudes radically. The congregation's complacency led them to give up their identification with Christ and their mission for him. The situation was terrible but not totally hopeless. Immediate steps were to be taken to "strengthen the things which remain." Some people and things were salvageable if quick and decisive action were taken. Otherwise, death would follow.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

What we believe and what we do must go hand in hand.

D. CORRECTION

Rev. 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

If they ignore His command to 'be watchful', Jesus would come upon them at a time completely unexpected.

Winston Churchill said to Britain in the early days of World War II, "I must drop one word of caution, for next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness is the worst of wartime crimes."

The Jesus Project—the group of theologians who concluded that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" is the only verifiable phrase spoken by Jesus in the Bible—is comprised of mainline Protestants. They are undermining people's beliefs by muddying even the clearest statements of Christ. These people do not believe and teach the Rapture, or even a Millennium. They teach that the promises of the kingdom, the sayings of Isaiah, the teachings of Revelation are simply allegorical. "Don't look for the Rapture," they say, "and don't look for a real kingdom established on earth." Thus, they will be totally caught off guard by Jesus' return.

Instead of getting angry at me for I am pointing out that some of the Protestant denominations are doing wrong, these denomination people should look hard into their doctrines and practices. Are they doing things that displease God? If the answer is "Yes," they should change them for the sake of God's glory.

Calvary Chapel is not an exception to this warning, either. As we studied before in the letter to the church of Ephesus, we as Calvary Chapel people, might be strong in the Lord's Word, but if we are not careful, we might lose our first love for the Lord.

E. PROMISE

Rev. 3:4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there is a faithful remnant. But there were only a few. In Pergamos and in Thyatira, there were a few bad among the good. But in Sardis there are a few good among the bad.

Jesus said, "they shall walk with Me in white." In my opinion, "Walk with Me" would be one of the greatest rewards Jesus can give to His followers. This shows close fellowship and friendship like between God and Enoch in Genesis 5:24.

A great expositor Warren Wiersbe said so well, "Heaven should not only be the destination of Christians, but a motivation."

The garments Jesus gives are always white. White was also the color of triumph to the Romans, so the white garments speaks of the believer's ultimate triumph in Jesus.

Jesus explained the absolute necessity of this being clothed by God with His garments of purity and righteousness in His parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:11-14. Real righteousness is receiving God's covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin with fig leaves in Genesis 3:7, but God provided them with a covering that came from animal skin in Genesis 3:21 which was the start of atoning sacrifice.

Rev. 3:5-6 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

With this verse we can have a major theological argument that goes all the way back regarding 'Eternal security of salvation.' Some people or denominations demand believers to choose Calvinism or Arminianism. It is nothing more than a tool of Satan to divide the church of Jesus Christ. He has used this method very effectively for last 500 years. It is one of the dumbest theologies for anyone can argue.

To quickly explain this to you, Calvinism believes that once you are saved, no matter what you do you are saved permanently and will go to heaven. Arminianism believes that if you sin, you have to get saved all over again each time. We in Calvary Chapel, don't take either side, because they both are right and wrong to some points. We believe that as much as we have free will to come to God for salvation, we have free will to leave Him. Yes, we believe that no outer force can take us away from the loving hands of God.

The contexts we must stay on in this verse is not about 'Eternal security,' but what Jesus declares to us. He said, "*I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*" That is the whole point. These remnants are going to stay with Jesus and He is going to claim them as His in the presence of the Father and His angels. This idea should make us to be more excited than arguing who is right about 'eternal security'.

F. POWERLESSNESS OF RELIGIOSITY

As I said some of you might be angry with me by now, because I talk against religion and against particular denominations. But bear with me a little while longer.

Religion might make you feel warm and cozy and appealing because it is made by men, not by God. Religion is a man's attempt to reach God which is impossible. But the regeneration through the relationship with Jesus Christ is God's mercy and grace to reach out to hell bound humankind.

Sardis was a city of peace of lethargy and living in the past glory. If you want to stay in those dead religious denominations like the Christians in the church of Sardis, that is up to you. But why? Did your religion die for your sins? All the good things you do and all the helps you give to others are nothing more than filthy rags in God's sight, because they don't meet His ultimate high standard.

You might say, "I did so many good things that God should let me in to heaven." How do you know what you've done is good enough to meet His standard? But the problem with that is that your sins that you were born with are still remaining inside of your heart. That must be taken care of by Him, not us.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) It is not enough to be religious and have a great church attendance.

The faith in Christ must produce life and works.

2) If you think that you are too spiritual to get knocked out by the devil, that means that you are already heading for fall.

Pr 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.