

8. The Message to the Church at Sardis

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain what lessons Christians can learn for our lives today from each of the churches. We still have three more churches as we come to Revelation 3. Each of these churches will have additional lessons for us to learn and teach.

In Revelation 3:1-2, we read, “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. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.’” Here, we see that Christ has the seven Spirits of God that are given in Isaiah 11:2. In Luke 4:14, we read, “Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.” During the time that Christ was living on the earth, we see that He ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here, we see that Christ continues to carry out His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is an illustration of the fact that the Trinity always works in unity.

We see that Christ had carefully observed the works of the church in the city of Sardis. This church claimed to be alive and many people probably thought of it as a church that was alive because of its activity. However, Christ said that this church was dead. Activity can mean that there is physical life but it does not mean that there is spiritual life. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Until Christ gives spiritual life, a person or a church is spiritually dead. In these verses, from Ephesians, we see that churches can be dead in trespasses and sins.

A dead church is a church that lives physically just like the world. Instead of a dead church being a light in the world, a dead church has no light for itself or for the world. As a result, it is still a part of the world. The people in such a church are still under the control of the prince of the power of the air (Satan). The people in a dead church are still the sons of disobedience. Such people conduct themselves according to the lusts of the flesh. They also fulfill the evil desires of the flesh and of the mind. A person who is spiritually dead has a sin nature but no new nature. The people in such churches are described in 2 Timothy 3:1-8. 2 Timothy 3:5 says, “Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” That is why they are called the children of wrath. A “church” name does not mean that the people have spiritual life.

However, even a dead church can have a few individuals in it that have spiritual life. As a result, Christ gave instructions to this small remnant of true Christians. First, Christ told them to be watchful. The word translated “watchful” means *to pay close attention to or to watch carefully*. The few true Christians were to pay close attention so that they could strengthen the things that remain. The word translated “strengthen” means *to make firm or to make stable*. The true Christians in this church were very discouraged and probably had a hard time even doing any

works for the Lord. As a result, the few works that they were doing were ready to die. In addition, their works had not been perfect before God. The word translated “perfect” is usually translated *fulfill or to fill up*. This means that their works were not all fulfilling the will of God.

Revelation 3:3-4 says, “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. 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.” Here, we see that the church was to think about and remember the things that they had received and heard. Like all of the churches, this church had originally received the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. They had been taught the teachings of Christ and the rest of the Word of God. At one time, they had heard and understood those things but they had not kept them in their minds.

Acts 2:42 tells us the things that the first church did when that verse says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” It was these basics that were no longer even in the minds of the people in the church at Sardis. The word translated “hold fast” means *to keep, to guard or to obey*. Christ is here urging the church to guard these things and repent. Christ also gave a warning if there was no repentance and a failure to watch or guard the things that were no longer even in their minds. Christ said that would result in Him coming to them like a thief. A thief never sends an advance notice to let others know that he is coming.

Luke 12:39-40 says, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” In the following verses, Christ made it clear that His coming would be sudden for both the believers and the unbelievers. Instead, Christ is talking about the fact that He will come to judge the church at Sardis. There will be no time to repent or get ready when Christ comes. That is why Christ warned the church at Sardis that it would not know the hour at which he would come to judge that church.

Christ then went on to talk about those at Sardis who had a true faith when He said, “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” We see that Christ said three things about these true believers. First, we see that they had not defiled their garments. The word translated “defiled” means *to contaminate, pollute or defile*. Revelation 14:4 says, “These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” Here, we see that they had not committed any form of immorality. 1 Corinthians 8:7 says, “However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.” In this verse, the word talks about people defiling their conscience by eating things offered to idols. In the previous topic, we saw that these were the two sins Jezebel used to deceive the church.

Second, Christ said that the true believers would walk with Him in white. Isaiah 1:18 says, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be

as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” In this verse, we see that white speaks of being purified from all sin. Then, Revelation 19:8 says, “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” In this verse, we see that white linen speaks of the righteous acts that we do as saints. True believers will walk with Christ in white because their sins are forgiven. In addition, all of our works that are righteous will be rewarded.

Third, Christ said that the true believers are worthy. The word translated “worthy” speaks of something having weight, value, or worth. Revelation 4:11 says, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” In this verse, we see that Christ is worthy to receive glory, honor and power. We also see that Christ has placed His infinite value on all believers so that we are worthy to walk with Him.

Then, Christ went on to explain the blessings that all overcomers will have for all eternity. First, we will all be clothed in white garments. We saw, in the earlier verses, that this includes having all of our sins blotted out, so that we stand in the righteousness of Christ. We also saw that the fine linen speaks of the righteous acts of the saints. 1 Corinthians 3:14 says, “If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.” Here, we see that those who walk in fine linen can also look forward to eternal rewards. Second, as overcomers we are assured that Christ will not blot out our name from the Book of Life. The fact that Christ promises that our names will not be blotted out of the Book of Life is a promise that has an eternal result. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Since our names will never be blotted out of the Book of Life this is another assurance of our eternal salvation.

Third, Christ says that He will confess our names before the Father and before His angels. This particular word translated “confess” means *to thank, to confess or to acknowledge joyfully*. Christ used this same word when He said, in Luke 10:21, “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” In this verse, we see that Christ thanked the Father for revealing truth to His disciples. In the same way, Christ will joyfully confess the names of all true believers before the Father and all of the angels.

Christ concluded the letter to the church at Sardis in the same way He concluded the letter to each of the churches, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children really hear and understand the message that was given to each of the seven churches so that they will be equipped to explain and apply these messages to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain these messages to the churches.