

Dear Church, Part 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2026

Preacher: David Eggleston

[0:00] Interesting to say the least, it isn't often that I am told what I must preach about.

! But here I am this morning with two pieces of scripture which I would not have chosen! if I had not been told that I had to. So I'm starting from scratch.

Here we have these two pieces of scripture read by Liz this morning, both from the book of Revelation. They form two of the seven letters that Jesus wrote to the churches in Asia Minor. And the two we're considering today are the churches in Ephesus and Sardis.

The letters are addressed to the angel. Now that's a misnomer for a start. I don't think there were any angels in Ephesus or in Sardis. But there were leaders, people who were in charge.

And it was the responsibility of that particular person, whoever he or she was, to receive the letter and share it with the congregation. I wasn't here two weeks ago, but those of you who were were, will remember that Simon set out quite clearly, I think, what these letters were all about and the book of Revelation in particular.

[1:39] This vision which John saw whilst he was exiled on the island of Patmos, John had come face to face with the living Christ.

And the vision of him must have shaken him to the core. It's a wonder he didn't die on the spot. Because of the shock of what he saw. Jesus in his glory.

And what we have today, or what we have to do today, is to look at those two messages to the two churches and to attempt to find out what relevance they have for us in the 21st century.

First of all, each letter begins with a moment of reflection. In the case of the Ephesian church, Jesus writes, I know your deeds, I know everything about you.

I know your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men. That you have tested those who claim to be apostles, but are not.

[2:54] And have found them false. Yet you have persevered. You have endured hardship for my name and have not grown weary.

Now, truth, that is some testimony. According to the commentator, one commentator, the church in Ephesus was the jewel in the crown of the churches in Asia Minor.

It was the most important church in that particular district. And John is reputed to have been the first bishop in Ephesus. Very influential in all the world at the end of the first century.

From the letters of Paul and in the Acts of the Apostles, it is evident that the church at Ephesus had a notable missionary, a notable ministry.

And Paul had a wonderful ministry there in Ephesus. So what went wrong? We'll come to that in a minute.

[4:08] Let's turn to the church in Sardis and see what Jesus has to say about them. The same pattern, this moment of reflection. I know your deeds.

That sounds familiar. Isn't that what Jesus said to the church in Ephesus? It resonates with what was said about the Ephesians. Jesus is scathing with his next comment.

You have a reputation for being alive. But you are dead. Crumbs. You have a reputation that you're alive. But crikey. You are dead.

In other words, you are not doing the things which you're supposed to. Wake up. Strengthen what remains and is about to die. For I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of God.

Remember therefore what you have received. And obey it. So what you have in Sardis is a church that was in its death throes.

[5:15] The second part of verse 2 indicates a breakdown in relationship. I have not found your deeds complete in my sight, says the Lord. A half-heartedness which will be your undoing.

You have gone to seed. Wake up. Do the things that I want you to do. Works of love. Faith. Service. Patience. Endurance.

Instead, their acts of love, worship and so on were all ignored. And these were characterized by half-heartedness.

A lack of zeal. By beginnings that never came to anything of worth. They were the works of a church which had become the incarnation of mediocrity.

These last comments are delivered from the commentary on Revelation by Professor Beasley Murray. He has a turn of words which leave me standing.

[6:15] Let's come back to Ephesus for a moment. And look at what Jesus says at the point where we left off. Picking up the comment at verse 3.

You have persevered. And have endured hardships for my name. And have not grown weary. Yet. This I will hold against you.

For you have forsaken your first love. Now can any indictment be more important to any church?

You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Then comes a word to both the church in Ephesus and the word in Sardis.

Repent. And do the things which you first did. Remember what you have received. Obey it.

[7:15] And repent. So the second thing is this about this note of repentance. Both churches have received a call to repentance.

They were doing things which were unsightly and unwelcome. And were not received with great joy by our God. Failure to do so brings severe consequences.

The charge against the Ephesians was that they had lost their first love. This is the most damning charge which can be pointed at any church.

You have lost the love that you had. If there is no love, what else can you come up with? A church without love is the antithesis of everything that the gospel of Christ stands for.

Our Lord, when he was questioned on one occasion about which was the greatest commandment, and he came straight out with the Shema. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength.

[8:23] And then, when you have done that, you can love your neighbor as yourself. Did the church in Ephesus repent?

It would appear that it did not. What about Sardis? According to verse 4, the word is that there are still a few who have not soiled their clothes.

A reference to the local trade of dyeing cloth. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

There was hope for Sardis. At least there were some who were still alive. The third thing about these two readings is this, that repentance could lead to renewal.

In the case of Ephesus, she had lost her love, the one quality with which all the others are worthless. You have abandoned the love you had at first, says Christ.

[9:32] What more need to be said about a church that had lost its way? Do not misunderstand me, says Jesus. You hate the word of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

I commend your zeal. But where is your love? Your very survival depends on that. Where is your love? Not to be seen.

And so the very first lamp, the very first lampstand was removed. Church and city have vanished. There is no trace of Ephesus in Asia Minor at all. 1 Corinthians 13, verse 2, sums it up very nicely. If I have prophetic powers, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

[10:42] Turn to Sardis. It would appear as though the church is blissfully unaware of the situation in which it finds itself. And I wonder how many churches there are in this country today who are in that situation.

It is as though the church, instead of standing on the promises, is merely sitting in the premises, waiting for the inevitable to happen.

Sleepwalking to oblivion, if you like. The siren cry then, which came from Christ, is for God's sake, wake up! Wake up! There are things to do, people to save, and you're doing nothing.

You're sleepwalking. There is still hope. There is something about the church in Sardis which we need to note. They were secure, complacent, and troubled by persecution and heresy.

They were in a strong place, and they had set themselves the task of avoiding hardship by pursuing a policy based on convenience, circumspection, rather than wholehearted zeal.

[11:57] And those are comments by the Reverend Michael Wilcock from his book, I Saw Heaven Opened. The church was offered a chance of redemption.

Wake up, repent, or Christ will come as a thief in the night when you least expect him to bring judgment and punishment. Down to you, folks.

Wake up and get on with the job. Wake up and get on with the church. On the 5th of June, 2005, the Methodist church in Linden Road was married to Christ Church here in order to form the ecumenical partnership of Christ Church Clevedon.

Its main objective was to become one church, not two churches sharing a building.

By and large, that objective has been achieved. Because we have been joined by ex-Baptists, United Reformers, Salvationists, and from the other free churches.

[13:17] We have a polyglot church. Everyone who signs up becomes half a Methodist and half Anglican. Don't ask me how it works because I haven't a clue.

But it works. It works. It just does. Now, supposing our Lord Christ in his infinite wisdom decides to send a letter to Christ Church, what would he write?

He would begin by saying, well, he may not write it by that. He may send an email. But to whom does he send it? He would send it to Simon, of course, because he's the chief honcho here at the moment.

What would he say? I know your works. I know what you're doing. And I see some of the good that you're doing.

But what is it that you are not doing? What task is there that you have started and left unfinished? 21 years ago, we came together and we have weathered the storms and survived 21 years of conjugal happiness for want of a better word.

[14:54] But after 21 years, I think Jesus would be asking these metaphorical questions which I have conjured up by myself, which I think may be quite probable.

Is your enthusiasm still as potent as it was 21 years ago? Have you settled into a comfortable complacency?

Thinking all is well? Have you lost the initial zeal for mission? Have your priorities shifted?

What do you need to improve? Whatever. Whatever. Whatever is. Victorial questions. But I think some of them need to be asked.

And I'm sure that the ECC has already got some of those in nine. I want to finish by quoting the second verse of a hymn which will end our service.

[16:09] And it says this. In my view, it is a challenge for all of us. Whether we need to expand our level, whether we need to wake up from our sleep.

But these are the words. Community of Christ. That's us folk. We are a part of the community of Christ here in Christ Church.

Community of Christ. Look past the church's door and see the refugee, the hungry and the poor. Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street.

Take towel and water that you wash your neighbor's feet. And the rest of the hymn goes on in similar fashion.

But what we've got this morning is reflection. Looking past to past glories. We have a word of repentance.

[17:17] We're not doing it right. Lord, forgive us. And this is what we intend to do. And if there is honest repentance, then there is that wonderful word called renewal.

So you've got three R's. Reflection, Repent, Renewal. And who knows what that renewal may take and what God will do with a renewed Christ Church.

I wait to see. Amen. fathers. Amen. Amen. fathers. Amen.