

# Sardis The Dead Church

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Preacher: Henry Dyck

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning.

I'd like to greet you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The day is coming quickly where we again celebrate His birth.

Is it not good to be living in the grace of our Lord? This morning, I'll be looking into the fifth church of the seven churches written about here in Revelation.

And it is the Church of Sardis, often given the title of the dead church. And so that is what I've titled the message this morning, the dead Sardis, the dead church.

So as I mentioned, it's the fifth church to receive a letter. And so just a little bit of history about Sardis.

[ 1 : 28 ] Sardis was located in Asia Minor. And so as we've seen on the map that's been put up a few times, there were the seven churches kind of in a rough circle in Asia Minor there.

And Sardis was on the eastern side of that circle. And so it was like last Sunday was shown again, Thyatira up on the eastern side, but starting to come back down a bit.

And so the next one is Sardis. And it was southeast of Thyatira by about 30 miles. And so Smyrna, one of the previous churches we've looked at, it was about 50 miles west of Sardis on the coast.

And so Sardis, it stood on a hill above the valley of Hermas. And it was backed up against steep cliffs behind it, the mountains in the background.

And it was thought that those cliffs were impossible to climb. And this is exactly what led to the downfall of Sardis.

[ 2 : 46 ] Their overconfidence in their security backed up against those cliffs. They failed to put guards up on the cliff to have watchful eyes up there.

And twice the city was captured by enemies who did scale those cliffs that were left unguarded. And they did capture the city. It happened to them twice.

Not only once, but twice. So they did not even learn the first time. So as the capital city of the Lydian kingdom in the 7th century, it was an important and a very wealthy city on a trade route within the country.

So it was on one of the major trade routes going east and west across the country. And much of its wealth came from manufacturing cloth and dyes and as well as trading in jewelry.

And so getting closer to the time frame where this letter was written to them, a little bit before that, but in 133 BC, Sardis came under Roman rule.

[ 4 : 00 ] And it was the capital of the province of Lydia. So Roman keeping the same name before it was a kingdom of Lydia and now a province of Lydia.

And then later on in the year 1402 AD, the Mongols completely destroyed the city of Sardis.

And so spiritually, Sardis was a hotspot as well. Idol worship was a big thing in the city of Sardis. There were many cults.

There were two great temples built there for sure. One temple was built to the god Artemis.

And the second one to the mother goddess Cybele. And so there was much wickedness practiced in the city of Sardis.

[ 5 : 05 ] And so the Christian church whom this letter is addressed to, it stood next door to the temple of Cybele. And so in looking through this letter, we'll again follow the pattern of the looking at who the author is identified.

And then from there, the commendation, the condemnation, and the promise, and so on. So looking at the author of the letter, if we read the first part of verse 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.

So it speaks to the author as he has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

And so again, we've heard this previously. What are the seven spirits of God? They were also mentioned in chapter 1 in verse 4 in John's vision of the Son of Man.

And there they are mentioned as being before God's throne. And here in our text, it says that he, being Christ, he has these seven spirits.

[ 6 : 36 ] I want to turn to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11, verse 2.

There's a prophecy regarding Christ, and it mentions these seven spirits. So Isaiah 11, verse 2. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

So the spirit of the Lord, verse 2 starts off with, we know to be the Holy Spirit. We have the spirit of wisdom and of the spirit of wisdom and of the spirit of wisdom and of understanding and of the fear of the Lord.

And we can also take note here that it reads that these seven spirits will rest upon him, rest upon Christ.

And so there it makes sense that it is he who has the seven spirits. It was prophesied here in Isaiah, and we see that in Revelation.

[ 8 : 08 ] And so both in our text in Revelation and here in Isaiah, it is the Holy Spirit in view when it talks of these seven spirits of God.

And I want to continue on here in Isaiah. I want to look at verses 3 through 5 as well. It reads, Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins and faithfulness the belt of his waist.

So these verses, they bring out, they talk about how Christ will exercise these seven spirits.

It says that his delight is in the fear of the Lord. So the spirit of the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees and hears, but he will judge in righteousness.

So it brings out the spirit of wisdom, of understanding, and as well of knowledge. And then as well, he will strike the earth and slay the wicked.

[ 9 : 39 ] It brings in the spirit of counsel and might. And it goes on, Righteousness and faithfulness are belts that Christ will be and is wearing.

He is righteous and faithful. He will be righteous and faithful in judgment, both for the poor and meek, as well as the wicked in this world.

Each one will reap as he has sown. Speaking of the poor and the meek, it reminds me of a few Sundays ago when we were looking at the Beatitudes to be poor in spirit.

They have their reward. And the wicked of this world have their reward as well. And so let's just keep in mind these seven spirits of God as we go through the letter to Sardis.

Let's go back to our text. Let's go back to our text. Let's go back to our text.

[ 10 : 55 ] Let's go back to our text.

Let's go back to our text.

Let's go back to our text. Let's go back to our text here.

as well, and they are his prized possession. And so where the shepherd leads them is of utmost importance to the Lord. If the shepherd chooses to lead the flock from the path Christ would have them to follow, he will give account for it as he is held to a higher standard and is directly accountable to the Lord. Each one is accountable to the Lord, and where a brother does something to another brother, he is accountable to make it right to him as well for leadership. If they do harm to the flock, they are directly accountable to the Lord.

And so from there, the letter continues on. Next, looking at the commendation. So following the pattern, looking at the commendation of Sardis. The problem is, there is no commendation for Sardis in this letter. Verse 1 continues on and goes straight into condemnation. In the previous letters that we've looked at to this point, Christ saw some good in each church.

[ 13 : 52 ] though evil was found within those churches, except maybe Smyrna, this evil didn't control them. It was, evil was the exception in those churches, not the norm. Here in Sardis, though, evil has corrupted the church. It has become normal. And so Christ finds nothing to commend them for. Though later he does address that there are a few within the church of Sardis who have not been defiled. So then let's look at the condemnation. Verse 1 continues, I know your works, that you have a name, that you are alive, but you are dead. Christ begins the letter with the familiar statement, the same as we've read in the previous letters, I know your works. He sees all that the church does. Nothing is hidden from him. The Lord knows, all things. And so where he commends after the statement, I know your works, the previous churches, the letters addressed to them, the commendation followed, the good things that they did. And yet here it goes right into condemnation. The church in Sardis has a reputation. It has a reputation of being alive. The city and the world gazing from the outside, they saw life within the church. It seemed vibrant and healthy. But in the Lord's eyes where it really counts, he says, but you are dead. What was not visible from the outside, Christ could see perfectly clear.

On the inside, the church was not even ailing. It was dead. Spiritually, there was no life. You know, we hear the phrase, putting lipstick on a pig, and it has the intended meaning of making something ugly look good. And this can be applied in many different scenarios or situations to put up a false front. But the Lord sees through all of that. We think back to last Sunday, the letter to Thyatira, how the Lord was introduced. Eyes like a flame of fire. He sees all and he saw what was going on in Sardis. Even today, churches will do well to heed the words that were written to Sardis and to self-examine.

You know, what is our identity? What defines us? Do we merely look alive or is there truly life within? Does what goes on in the church glorify God? Or is this building covered in lipstick?

You know, we can go past a church and we see a parking lot full of vehicles. It seems the church is doing well. And yet, what is going on inside? What is the flock being fed? Are they being fed the truth of God's Word, being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Or are they being fed what makes them feel good, that elevate self? You know, a big concern in churches today, programs.

Any given day, there can be something going on within a church building. Many are attending. And again, from the outside, it looks like it's doing well. And yet, what is the reason those people are there for? Does the function that they are participating in bring glory to God or to themselves?

[ 18 : 48 ] What type of fruit comes out of it? Are they working for the Lord? Are they busy being busybodies? Another concern is what many churches are teaching. Is the truth of God's Word being brought out?

Or is the congregation hearing these warm and fuzzy messages like, God is love? God is love, but He is also righteous and just, and He will punish sin.

The congregation needs to know who God is. They need to be prepared to meet Him. Or is the danger within the church idol worship?

And we heard about this again last Sunday. We heard about this. This was a problem in the city of Sardis. It was consumed with idol worship.

The temples and altars to these idols stood within their cities, or within their city. You know, did the members of the church of Sardis, did they stop in there?

[ 20 : 08 ] The temple was right next door. Did they stop in there before the service? Or maybe after the service? What about during the week? Were they living for Christ Monday through Saturday?

Or were there idols in their life blocking their view of God? Are we dabbling with idols? Is our life cluttered with things that keep us from our Lord?

It's a reality check for us today, is it not? We must evaluate our priorities, make sure the order of them is right.

Let's continue on, looking at verses 2 and 3. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

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.

[ 21 : 19 ] Though the church at Sardis was dead in the eyes of the Lord, verse 2 brings it out that not everyone in the church was dead.

It was obvious the majority of them were spiritually dead, but there were some who clung to a flicker of life. If it wasn't for those few, would there have been any reason for Christ to issue them this warning, if they had all fallen away already?

And so he urges them to be watchful, something that the city itself should have exercised, and yet they failed to do, which resulted in being captured by the enemy.

The church, too, was in danger of being completely overtaken by the enemy. Mostly it was already, but for a small minority that still had life within them.

And so they are encouraged to support that remaining element, to strengthen them, to protect them, for their works were not perfect before their maker.

[ 22 : 41 ] And although they clung to life, they were feeble, and their works were lacking, not fulfilling the intended purpose. Further, they were to remember how they received and heard the gospel message.

The church had been founded on the gospel. It had started with a good foundation, and they were to think back to that, to what they had first received and heard.

The warning was for them to hold on to what they had at the start, to hold on to that first love, and repent of the wrongs that they had committed.

The message is, repent of the sins that weigh you down, that are dragging you to a disastrous end. And that end, if they were not watching, would result in Christ coming upon them as a thief, suddenly and unexpectedly.

Now this is the same wording that Scripture uses to describe Christ's second coming. He will come as a thief in the night without warning.

[ 24 : 04 ] But the warning given to Sardis here isn't referring to Christ's second coming. The church in Sardis, as well as the whole city, they met, they have met their end already.

The city lies in ruins. The church lies in ruins. They have found, they have excavated many of those ruins. The part of that ruined church has been uncovered, as well as the temples, other buildings within the city.

But very early in the 1400s, Sardis was destroyed. And we need to remember, Christ has the seven spirits.

Counsel and judgment came to Sardis, and they came in the form of the Mongols that destroyed the city, that wiped it out. You know, in this warning, applies to churches today still.

Should they go astray and spiritually become dead, the hour will come when Christ will come as a thief and deliver judgment on them. Any such coming will be swift and it will be final.

[ 25 : 35 ] Just as swift and final as His second coming will be, there will be no going back. And so again, the warning, be watchful, strengthen what remains, remember what you have received and heard, hold fast to it and repent.

Next, the promise, verses 4 and 5. Here we see the further proof that a few names that a few remained in Sardis who were still alive spiritually.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. The church there in Sardis looked lively.

They even had a name for being so. Yet Christ saw their works that they were empty and dead. And still, even in such an environment, a few names remained who were faithful.

A solemn reminder even for us to not paint everyone in a church with the same brush. There may very well be those few who are still faithful.

[ 27 : 16 ] And to those faithful few a promise was given. They shall walk with Christ Jesus in white for they are worthy.

These godly few in Sardis would walk with their Lord and Savior. They would be robed in white, rewarded for their faithful service. And they would spend eternity with their Lord.

that promise is extended to any such as would overcome in Sardis as well as in all churches even today.

That any who will overcome shall be clothed in white garments. The devil is still out there in the world roaming around seeking anyone whom he might devour.

Most of the church in Sardis he had devoured but he was not satisfied. He seeks to destroy everyone he can for he knows his eternal destination and he would have every man, woman and child join him there.

[ 28 : 37 ] A few evenings ago this past week I sat down with the baptism class and we looked at the lesson how to overcome the devil. and we looked at the tactics that Satan would use to try and deceive us.

He is so subtle coming ever so close to the truth yet twisting it just enough to derail us if we are not watchful. And unfortunately he is all too often successful.

we must be on our guard and resist him and that all important first step to resisting the devil is to be submitted to God as James 4 7 instructs us.

when we are yielded to him to God suited up in his armor and walking in his strength and not our own then we are able to resist our enemy the devil and he will flee from us.

These battles we will face all the days of our life and on our own we will fail we will fall we can only be victorious in the Lord with his help.

[ 30 : 02 ] If we overcome if we with the Lord on our side withstand the devil we too shall be clothed in white garments in the presence of our Lord forevermore and he will not blot out our name from the book of life.

And that is a promise if we overcome by no means will our names not be found in the book of life.

Jesus himself will confess our names before the Father and his angels. He concludes in verse 6 with the familiar invitation he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Not only to those in the church in Sardis but to each one who has an ear who is willing to listen to the words of Jesus let him hear understand and even act upon what the Spirit says to the churches.

And so in closing to just follow along in the prophetic foreshadowing the letter what period of the church age it pertains to my knowledge on church history is not that great yet it is still an area that I need to grow in to study into more but recently sitting down with Pastor Wayne he shared with me a book on the topic of these letters to these seven churches and there was a paragraph in there that kind of described the area where this would fall in what part of the church age and so I'll read that paragraph for us and so this is what it said in keeping with the prophetic foreshadowing of the church age as seen in the other churches some have held that the church at Sardis is a picture of a church in the time of the protestant reformation when a great mass of

[ 32 : 27 ] Christendom was dead even though it had had a name that had lived during those years only a small believing portion took their stand for true biblical revelation and trusted in Christ as Savior the characteristics of the church in Sardis remarkably parallel those of the church in the period of the protestant reformation and so this fact seems to confirm the judgment that the message delivered to this first century church was prophetic of the future of the church at large during this period let's continue in our zeal for the Lord seeking to do his will may he find us faithful that we may overcome and receive the white garments receive our reward and walk in his presence forevermore let's pray heavenly father we bow again before you this morning

Lord we are ever thankful for your grace and for your mercy we are thankful for your hand of protection upon us Lord we are thankful for the life you give us the life you have given us that we have received when we heard and received the gospel message and brought Christ accepted Christ into our life Lord that first love that fills us with life so abundant and vibrant Lord may we cling to that life and may we produce and bear the fruit that ought to come out of it may we be found faithful may we not be merely lively looking on the outside but may there be life within may the heart of the church be healthy

Lord I just thank you for this congregation again this morning may you go with each one of us as we leave from here guide and direct us throughout the week and just give us give us life and may that life be evident to all we come into contact with in Jesus name we pray amen