

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

The Church That Was Dead But Didn't Know It

Program #1051

Eddie Parrish & Mark Teske

EDDIE: As the old saying goes, looks can be deceiving. Jesus once said that we're not to judge according to appearances (John 7:24). Today we're going to study about a congregation that appeared to be alive, but Jesus said they were dead. Stay tuned for our study.

EDDIE: We're so glad to have you on the program today. I hope you have your Bible with you and are ready to study with us today from God's word. We'll be in the third chapter of the book of Revelation. We are continuing our series of lessons on the seven churches of Asia. Mark Teske is on the program again this time, and we're glad to have him here. He's going to bring us up to date on some of the lessons that we've learned so far in the series.

MARK: Well, Eddie, we introduced this subject talking about chapter 1, and we see Jesus walking among the lampstands, as the Head of the church, and One who is active and involved. That picture is given to us in figurative language and is very clearly and plainly portrayed for us. Then we looked at several of the churches, four of them to be exact, and learned many lessons about Jesus and His interaction with the church. For one thing, we saw that He does not tolerate error and He does not expect us to do so. Those who hated the deeds of those who were working wickedness were commended. Those who were tolerating error were being condemned for such toleration. We see Jesus as being very pleased with them for things they were doing well, such as their love, faith, patience, service and other positive characteristics. We see Him

having a lot of interaction with the church as He gives warnings and admonitions. But we see Jesus clearly as the head of His church.

EDDIE: That's right. Today in our continuing study, we're going to be looking at the church in Sardis from the first six verses of chapter 3. Just by way of background information on the city of Sardis that you might find interesting, it was located about 30 miles south, southeast of Thyatira, a congregation and city that we spoke about in a previous session. Sardis was one of the oldest cities in Asia Minor. It was built on top of a rock hill. It was located some 1500 feet above the Hermus Valley. It was a city that was unapproachable from three sides because of its location on this very rocky hillside. Three sides of the city couldn't be approached at all, and the fourth side was very easily defended. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in the year AD 17 and was rebuilt with Roman tax dollars.

MARK: In looking at the history of the city of Sardis, it's kind of interesting to note that though they had that protection on three sides and vulnerability only on one side, historically on several occasions armies would sneak up on Sardis, and they caught them asleep. As we get into the letter to the church, I think we see some of those same interactions happening among the Christians in that church as well.

EDDIE: That's right. I think the Lord will make a very subtle reference to some of those sleepy times among the people of Sardis a little bit later. But as Jesus begins this particular letter, He starts, as He does with all the other letters to these congregations, by identifying Himself, (Revelation 3:1), in a couple of ways. First of all, He identifies Himself as the one who has the seven spirits of God. Now, again, we're dealing with highly figurative language here, and I readily admit that I don't have all the answers to what some of these symbols are intended to convey. Several ideas have been proposed about what this seven spirits of God is a reference to. Probably the most popular understanding of what this has in mind is that this is some kind of reference to the Holy Spirit. That's not a view that's espoused by all, but it is one view and does, I believe, have some merit. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, (I Corinthians 2). And though there is certainly only one Holy Spirit, (Ephesians 4:4), the number seven of course, figuratively, as we've talked about previously, is a number of perfection. So perhaps this is a

program catalog online. There are a lot of helpful things there. So contact us and let us know what your request is, and we'll be glad to fill it for you. Mark, thanks again for being part of the program today. We hope that you have enjoyed our study, and we'll continue it next time.

© 2006 The Truth in Love

Eddie Parrish, Speaker
Mark Teske, Executive Director

The Truth in Love
P.O. Box 865
Hurst, TX 76053

www.thetruthinlove.com
requests@thetruthinlove.com

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." So on the one hand, you have the opportunity for Jesus to confess your name before the Father, or in other words, to confess in a positive way and to align Himself with you before God. And then the other, like from the passage you mentioned earlier in Matthew 7, there's confess, and then there's depart. It doesn't take smart individuals to figure out, if they're honest, which one of those sides they want to be on.

MARK: Yes. And even if we do not confess, but as Peter did to Jesus when He was going through His trial right before His crucifixion, denied Him, that wasn't the end of it all. Even though we may at one point deny Him, God is gracious, and as we read earlier about Jezebel, He gives time to repent. We also have that opportunity. If you're listening to this television program right now, you have an opportunity to repent of that and to come back to His way, and you too can have your name written in the Book of Life. You can walk with Him in white, in purity, and by His side. You can be His child.

EDDIE: That's right. It's a wonderful thing to contemplate about the opportunity and privilege to be a child of God. If you will put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, believe that He is who He said He was, (John 8:24), and if you'll repent of your sins and confess your faith in Christ, (Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10), and then if you'll allow yourself to be baptized, (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of your sin, the Lord will wash your sins away by His own blood and add you to His church. That's the simple plan. We hope that if we can in any way help you in your obedience to the gospel that you will contact us and let us know how we can help and assist you. We'd also like to offer you a copy of today's lesson on audiocassette or CD or a DVD, if you prefer. Those are absolutely free. We don't charge for any of those materials. We also have written materials, some pamphlets and tracts, one of which is entitled *From My Heart To Yours* written by Maxie Boren. We'd love for you to have any of these. If you'd like to have one of those or a copy of today's lesson, just contact us, P.O. Box 865, Hurst, Texas 76053. Or if you prefer to contact us by e-mail, you can do that, requests@thetruthinlove.com. Our web site, www.thetruthinlove.com has a lot of information on it, and you can order materials and look at our

reference to the perfect Spirit of God.

MARK: I think there's some benefit to that interpretation. As we look at the number seven, that number for completeness and totality, we're told in the book of Colossians that, "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). So we see that totality of deity within Jesus. And it would make sense to have the number seven there, and it corresponds as well with other passages we see within scripture.

EDDIE: Yes. And the other way He refers to Himself is the One who has the seven stars. Now, we're not left to guesswork here. We're not left to try to fit the pieces together, because this is one of those symbols in the book of Revelation where John, the writer of the book, comes right out and says this is what this particular symbol represents. And this takes us back to Revelation 1:20, where John says these seven stars represent the angels or messengers of the seven churches. We've talked previously about who that may have been. Just because you see the word angel in scripture does not necessarily mean, though it often does, a heavenly being. The word simply means messenger and can refer to a human messenger, and I believe that's probably what you have here.

MARK: As you ably brought out in a previous lesson, it really doesn't make sense for Jesus to be addressing this to a heavenly being, because this is a book for us here on earth, and very applicable to those first New Testament Christians. So it would make sense to be interpreted to the messenger of the church and looking just at that local congregation, possibly the preacher or one of the elders or leaders there in that congregation.

EDDIE: Yes, Jesus says He's the One who has these seven stars in His hand. They're in His care and protection, which goes back to one of the themes that just keeps coming up over and over again, and that is the presence of the Lord among His people, both individually and in congregations collectively. From His identification, He then goes into His condemnation of their sin. Now, one of the interesting things here is that Sardis represents mostly a tragedy, whereas in most of the congregations that the Lord references, He has some kind of positive thing to say about them, such as, "I know your labor, love, patience and things of that sort. But it is very interesting that with Sardis, He doesn't

say anything of a positive nature at this point. He has something a little positive He'll say later, but right off the bat, He doesn't say anything positive here.

MARK: The overwhelming tone of this letter is much more negative than some of the others we've read. And when He begins talking about the positive qualities, He lists only a few, which isn't nearly as good as what we've seen in other congregations where their qualities and positive characteristics are listed almost like a laundry list. Here they are, good thing, good thing, good thing. But when we get to Sardis, we don't read that list.

EDDIE: Right.

MARK: It's a tragedy.

EDDIE: Yes. He starts this letter the same way He does the others by saying, "I know your works." Evidently, the Lord wants to get it across to all these congregations, and to the rest of us too, that He knows who we are. He knows where we are and He knows what we're doing. He knows us inside and out. And concerning Sardis, He says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead," (Revelation 3:1). As we pointed out at the beginning of our program today, looks can be deceiving. Evidently, the church in Sardis was a congregation that, at least in some circles, had a pretty good reputation. They were known in some ways to be a living, vibrant congregation. But the Lord gives them a devastating blow when He doesn't just say that they have a few issues or a few problems, or even that they need to tinker with this and tweak that. He tells them they have a reputation of being alive, but they are actually without life. They were dead.

MARK: It's very telling that Jesus allows this self-deception to go on. While we may think we can fool somebody else, we can't fool God. And clearly here, these people didn't realize the situation they were in. If they truly realized that situation, they would have fixed it. But they deceived themselves and others as well. That reputation was not earned, but was false indeed. We can't go on reputations alone, but we need to look at the substance and make judgments based upon the true facts of what's going on. As you quoted earlier, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment," (John 7:24).

of them could have been faithful. The fact that some of them were faithful proves that, which was further incentive and reason for the Lord to say, you people need to straighten up and repent and go back and do these things so that you can be pure yourselves. So to these that had not defiled their garments, Jesus made the promise, "They shall walk with me in white," another one of those figurative references that we would readily recognize.

MARK: The white is symbolic of the purity, and then we see the walking side by side with Jesus. That's something very comfortable for us and an image that makes a lot of sense. It brings a lot of emotionally positive things to us. Walking side by side with Jesus, and sharing with Him in His glory as well as in His efforts here on earth is quite a privilege for us to have before us, if we indeed follow through and do what He asked us to do.

EDDIE: The possibility of that in the future is something wonderful to contemplate. In addition to that, He says, not only will they walk with me in white, but their names will be written in the Book of Life. That is referenced in other places in scripture. Jesus once told His disciples in Luke 10:20, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." That's an important thing. Paul would reference a couple of fellow workers in the book of Philippians (Philippians 4:3), where he mentions those that were workers with him "whose names are in the Book of Life." That's where we want our names to be written. When you were in school and you had your name written on the chalkboard, that was a bad thing. But here's a place you want your name, in the Lamb's Book of Life, which is God's roll book of those that are headed toward heaven.

MARK: That's even better than the honor roll we had when we were in school. And that, like all spiritual blessings, is only found in Christ Jesus. There is no writing in the Lamb's Book of Life if we're not in Christ.

EDDIE: Right. Then further in this promise, He says that these who have been faithful and would walk with Him in white would also be those whose names the Lord would confess. Jesus once made a promise to that effect when He walked the earth. In Matthew 10:32-33, He said,

think back and recall the former days, (Hebrews 10:3). Turning back to Sardis, Jesus references specifically the idea of their receiving and embracing the things they had previously heard. That is a great admonition for people to not only hear, but to embrace and receive and not just let it go in one ear and out the other, but to apply it. That's part of the prescription that Jesus gives for them.

MARK: And like a good leader does, He says, if you do these things, and if you make these corrections, here's what you have in store for you. He gives them a promise very clearly and beautifully stated for them.

EDDIE: Yes. Right before that promise, He says, if you don't do these things, or in other words, if you don't repent and turn from these things, He promised that he will come as a thief. That brings our attention to II Peter 3:10 which says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." The idea there, of course, is unexpectedly or suddenly. Thieves don't send postcards and tell you when they're coming to rob you blind. So He says, I'll come as a thief if you don't watch these things. And then in verses 4-6, He does issue that promise. Here is that small reference to something that is positive, where He says that there were some in the congregation in Sardis that had personally not defiled their garments. And He promised, "They shall walk with me in white." So while the congregation generally and as a whole could be described as being dead, there still were some individuals who specifically were not dead, which tells us that each person is going to be judged individually. While in one sense, on the whole a congregation may be dead, yet there still may be some within it who are doing the best they can to live righteously, morally and according to God's direction.

MARK: At the same time, the application would hold true that you may have a congregation that's very good and some within the congregation who are not doing as God would have them to do, and they would fall in the other way. So very clearly, we need to be careful of ourselves personally, as well as pay attention to the congregation in which we worship to make sure that collectively, things are okay. But individually we have a responsibility for our own souls.

EDDIE: Yes. The fact that some of the brethren in Sardis had not defiled their garments proves that all of them could have been pure. All

EDDIE: Yes. So this congregation that, to the eyes of some looked to be a very strong congregation and a pillar church, was clearly not. It further reminds us of something that periodically in scripture, God calls to our attention. God regularly and methodically wanted to remind us of the principle that sometimes we don't see things the way He does. And while others were looking at this church and seeing one thing, God looked at it and saw something completely different. In I Samuel 16:7, the statement is made, "For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." While we may intend to view things from the way they appear visually or externally, God looks deep within and sees things as they truly and genuinely are. This was a congregation that was dead on the inside, but from the outside, it was difficult for other people to see. So they must have been active in some capacity. They must have been doing a number of things that gave others a good impression. But it was a wrong impression. Their actions were empty and hollow. They were vain. And congregations need to be careful about that. Don't start believing your own press. You may have a lot of people that are patting you on the back and saying what a good congregation you are, and what a good person you are, but we need to look deep inside and view things from heaven's perspective (with a Biblical perspective) and see truly and genuinely whether or not the accolades that we receive are genuinely deserved. And from His condemnation of them, then He turns to give them a warning.

MARK: His warning starts with the words, "Be watchful." As we talked about the history of Sardis, we saw that the real folly of Sardis was that even though they had these great defenses, and should have been a fortress and a city that was hard to conquer, when it came down to practicality, they were very easy to conquer because they had become very unwatchful. They lost their diligence. They relied so much upon the external defenses that they didn't pay attention, and they were sleeping when their enemies crept up. I think we see the same thing happening in the church here as well.

EDDIE: Yes. I think this is that subtle reference that we were talking about earlier. Cyrus, the Persian king, and then Antiochus, during the period we normally refer to as between the testaments, (the period about 218 B.C.), were responsible for overtaking Sardis because they just weren't being watchful. And what Jesus wants them to do is think about

that situation and perhaps draw upon their own national history and say what they weren't doing in a physical sense in guarding the city, you're not doing spiritually, and you've allowed yourself to be overtaken by sin, and because of that you've been overthrown spiritually. And though you think you're alive, you're not. You are spiritually dead. If we don't make that application ourselves and keep a watch on our souls and our own condition, then we could find ourselves in the exact same position of thinking that we're right with God and in good spiritual shape, and the exact opposite may be true.

MARK: As we read in Matthew 7:21-23, those people at the judgment day who are surprised and saying, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and do these marvelous works in your name, and He said, "I never knew you; depart from me." These were people who were deceiving themselves up until the judgment day, who thought they were right, but really were in a sad state of affairs.

EDDIE: That's why Jesus would issue these warnings like in Matthew 26:41 when He told His disciples, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." There's something to be said for watchfulness. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, arm yourselves as men and be strong," (I Corinthians 16:13).

MARK: As sad as all this sounds, there's still that little gleam of hope for the church here. There's still that remnant, "establish what remains," speaking of those who haven't fallen into this false sense of security, those whose garments have not been stained.

EDDIE: Right. Though from a congregational standpoint, He could look at the whole, He could also look at the entirety and say, this is a dead church. But like you say, there was hope, because He said there are some things that do remain, and those things can be established. One writer said something along the lines of there were smoldering coals in that congregation that still had the capacity to be fanned into flame. And that's what He wanted them to do. They still had works that could be productive. Though He also says in this same section, verses 2 and 3, you can be productive again, though your works presently are not complete before God. So they had some things going and some works that they were doing, that just weren't perfect or complete. Perhaps they needed to

come out of the fickle nature they had. Perhaps they were good at starting things and weren't good at finishing them. But there were some things remaining that Jesus said you can do something with that, if you will.

MARK: They hadn't completed, perfected or finished what they had indeed started, and what little they had done needed that follow through and needed to spread not only with those people to continue on through, but to others in the congregation as well.

EDDIE: Paul said about the church at Galatia, "You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7). He told them somebody had gotten in their way. And maybe Sardis was this way. They had been running well, but something or someone had hindered them, and so their works were not complete before God. Maybe it was immaturity, or simply their lack of watchfulness. Whatever it may be, (or maybe a combination of a number of things), Jesus said on the whole, congregationally, you may think you're alive and have a reputation that you are, but you're not. You're dead. So you need to establish those things that remain. In addition to that, He offers them the admonition to remember again, to hold fast and to repent, which are all good admonitions for somebody in that condition.

MARK: Jesus doesn't leave them with this condemnation and nowhere to go. He lays the map out for them. This is where you need to go, and this is how you need to improve. I find it interesting that several times when congregations had problems, He tells them to go back and remember the way things used to be. You were traveling down the right road, and you departed. You need to come back to where you were before. "Seek the old paths," as Jeremiah said, (Jeremiah 6:16). Seek the old way and remember the way things were. If you keep going the way you're headed, you're headed for destruction. Go back to the direction where you started.

EDDIE: Right. That reminds us of the Galatians 5 passage. You did run well. Who got you off that course? We studied a few weeks ago from Revelation 2, where He says of the church in Ephesus, "Remember from where you have fallen." We could also reference the writer of Hebrews, who said something to the people there about the need to remember, to