

Letters to 7 Churches 07 Sardis-a Cold Heart

by James Booker

The sermon on Sardis emphasizes the danger of spiritual complacency and the need for repentance to revive a cold hearted church.

Duration: 39:37

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:4, Galatians 5:16, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Revelation 3:1-4

Topics: "Spiritual Revival", "Church Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher compares the church of Sardis to an army and encourages the congregation to join the army of the Lord. The sermon is divided into five points: the supreme commander of the army, the sad condition of the army, the solemn command given to the army, the separated company in the midst of the army, and the satisfied conquerors who have conquered in the army. The preacher emphasizes the importance of starting, continuing, and ending with Christ as the supreme commander. The church of Sardis is criticized for its lack of commendation, except for a few faithful individuals. The sermon also references Ephesians chapter 4, highlighting the need for believers to awake from spiritual sleep and receive light from Christ.

Transcript

Good morning. Shall we turn, please, to the third chapter of the Book of Revelation, the Church of Sardis, the third chapter of the Book of Revelation. And unto the angel of the church in Sardis Reich, these things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. For I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

And he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Our gracious Father, again we thank thee that we can gather in this simple way. We thank thee we live in a land where we can openly

gather together and openly discuss thy word.

We thank and praise thee for the privileges that are ours in Christ. And now we pray that thou would guide us, direct us into the understanding of thy word that we might be challenged, that the time together might be glorifying to thee and edifying to each one of us. We pray this in our Savior's worthy and precious name.

Amen. Well, I trust you had an opportunity to read over this portion since last evening and come up with a little heading for this particular church. Some sister in the Lord said to me this morning that in looking over there was only one particular word that she could think of in this particular church, and that was cold.

And that's just the word I have in mind, a cold heart. You notice it says in verse 1, I know thy works that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead, and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, and there's nothing more cold than a dead body.

A cold heart. So let's consider that, shall we, together. Various titles would come to our mind as we consider this particular church as a whole.

One title is The Church That Was Dead. I didn't know it. Another title which would fit it very aptly, I feel, is this.

A church which had a past to be proud of, but a present to be pitied. A church that was materially prosperous, but spiritually bankrupt. A church with a reputation for being alert, but in reality was fast asleep.

A church with past memories, but was a present morgue. As I read over this particular church, I'm reminded of an incident that happened a number of years ago when I was in Newfoundland with my wife and family. We were working in a little town called Old Purlican, and the Lord had been pleased to bless, and a number had professed salvation.

A little assembly had been formed, and the little room that we had rented was crowded out, so we had to begin building a little chapel. So a group of the Christians, the born-again new Christians, got together and off we went into the woods, cut down trees, and eventually we had a load of logs, and we started to build the chapel. I remember this particular day when the chapel had just... we just had the basement finished.

It was a flat roof. We just had tar paper around the building. Not very impressive looking things, to say the least.

And I was working around the side on the building. It was in the summertime, and a couple of people were walking down the street--tourists, apparently--and they were looking over the various scenes, the fishing homes and so on. And they came to this unusual-looking building, and they couldn't see me because I was around the side, but I could hear them talking.

And apparently they had stopped, and they were sizing up the situation, and they were saying, Now what kind of a building can this be? And they were giving certain suggestions, one to the other. And finally the husband said, with apparent light dawning in his mind, he said, Oh, I know what it is. He said, It's the new coal storage plant that they must be building here in this town.

I thought to myself, Well, I trust that these things are not like a coal storage plant. But perhaps we go around to many gatherings of God's people, and after we've been there for a while, we feel a lot just like being in a coal storage plant. Cold hearts.

Cold hearts. May the Lord challenge us along this line that we might not be cold-hearted, but might be warm-hearted for Him as we look at this church. I'm reminded of Samson.

Shall we just turn over just for a moment, please, to one verse in the book of Judges, chapter 16? It's a verse that I'm sure all of you are acquainted with, but it fits into the lesson of Sardis so much that I want to just read it rather than try to quote it. Judges, chapter 16. You remember Samson.

His name means strong. His name means sun-like. And he was strong in the Lord.

He had long, flowing hair, and as a Nazarite dedicated to the Lord, he did many exploits for Him. However, he gradually drifted, became involved with this woman, Delilah. And you remember how she plied him with questions, seeking to get the answer to his strength.

And one thing after another, he told her one thing, and then another, and something else. And eventually he came out with the truth as to where his strength lay. And notice verse 19.

And she made him sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head. And she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.

And he awoke out of his sleep. And this is the sad, tragic thing. And said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.

And he wished not, but the Lord departed from him. Why not just shake myself and go out just like I have done in the past? Now still do great exploits for the Lord. But he never realized that the Lord had departed from him.

He had lost his strength. He was dead spiritually, in that sense, in his contact and his power with the Lord. This dear church at Sardis, they wished not.

They did not realize that their strength had departed. They were carrying on. They were going on with their regular program, but as the Lord looked upon them, he said, I'm sorry to say, while you have a name to live, you're dead.

You're dead. Now this particular church has been applied prophetically, as we are aware, to the Reformation. And no doubt it has many lessons in that area from around 1500 to 1700 to 1800, where under Luther and others, they came forth out of Roman Catholicism and out of all the ritual of that particular era.

And there was a mighty revival of the gospel, of the grace of God, and justification by faith was spread throughout the land. But it soon degenerated into a formal state of things. It seems to me it can apply to so many other areas as well.

I think it could apply in general terms to that movement known as Brethren in the 1800s, when it began, and the mighty sweep of that movement throughout the British Isles and throughout the world, and the Lord blessed in a wonderful way wherever those principles were put into action. But now, some hundred

and fifty or so years later, of many of our gatherings together, it could be said, you've had a name to live, but you're dead. You're dead.

And I can think, and I'm sure you can think of many companies of God's people, when they began their movement, I can think of a little work right in the area where I am working. And about twenty-two years ago, we had the joy of working in this little community, this little village. The number again, Trusted Christ as Savior, a little work was started.

And I can recall the first Remembrance Service. As we gathered together, about thirty of us, and none of them had ever had the privilege of just gathering in that simple manner before, around the emblems, the bread and wine, allowing the Spirit of God to guide and direct the hearts. And it was so fresh and real to them, and the tears flowed, and there was just a tremendous spirit of worship.

There wasn't a dry eye as the saints just wept their way through the meeting. Well, that was some twenty-two years ago. And now, as you go there, the numbers have grown, thankfully.

I suppose about forty-five in fellowship there now, but somehow or other, there's a spirit of deadness that's settled in. Oh, how easy it is. We start out with such enthusiasm, and then things begin to wane and go down.

Well, that's what had happened to this particular church. It started out with tremendous possibilities, tremendous power, tremendous witness. But just a few years later, the Lord says, you're dead.

You're dead. As far as the history of this particular city is concerned, it had an impressive location, so we're told. And originally, in the times when our Lord wrote this letter to them, the city was situated on an acropolis some fifteen hundred feet above sea level.

The little city could be seen for miles around. It had a tremendous location. It was situated on a great rock, but apparently over the years that rock had been affected by a number of earthquakes, and it was split in various areas.

And there was much of the stone crumbling and earth and mud all around it, so that while it looked from a distance to be very impressive as a tremendous rock, yet it was a very frail, delicate thing. In fact, Sir William Ramsey, in describing his experience whilst there in archaeological work, says this, and I've just written it down here. He says, Sardis wore an imposing, commanding, impregnable aspect as it dominated the magnificent broad valley of the Hermas.

But close at hand, that is when you got close to the building or to the hill, it seemed to be but mud, slightly compacted, never trustworthy or lasting, crumbling under the influence of the weather, ready to yield to the blow of the speed. It was an appearance without reality. It had promise without performance.

And that's just like the Church. Built upon the rock, Christ Jesus, the solid rock, and yet crumbling through lack of contact and lack of power with the Lord. Turn with me, if you will, please, to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. For it seems to me what the Lord is talking about here to these Christians is just exactly what He's concerned about to the church at Sardis.

And it's not with my intent to spend much time on this, but just to point out a couple of things and then go back to the church at Sardis, please. Ephesians chapter 3. I'm sorry, Ephesians chapter 5. Verse 13, But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. For whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. It's possible, you see, beloved, to be asleep. We're aware of this, and here is Paul challenging the church at Ephesus, Awake thou that sleepest.

It's time to awaken, does he. It's time to arise. He goes on and he tells us in the next verse, See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools.

Walk carefully. Beloved, if there's ever a time when saints of God need to be awakened to the times in which we live, it's now. If there's a time we need to be careful the way we walk as Christians, it's now.

Notice he says in verse 16, Redeeming the time. It's time to consider the opportunities. The word redeeming is to buy up every opportunity.

It's no time to be sitting back and saying, Well, it's time to retire from the things of the Lord. Let's buy up every opportunity. The time is short.

The Lord's coming is near at hand. Darkness is settling in stronger and stronger, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

You see, it's time not only for us to awake, time not only for us to shine, time not only for us to be careful as to our work, to be conscientious about things, but it's time to understand what God's will is for us, and to fulfill and carry out that will. And then he says in verse 18, And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit. And as we'll notice in a moment as we go back to Sardis, this was the whole point, it seems to me, that the Lord was concerned about.

These dear saints had left the Holy Spirit of God out of their activities, and they were operating in the energy of the flesh. And he longs that these dear saints at Ephesus might be filled or controlled by the Spirit, that they might in turn speak one to another, exhorting one another, sing one to another, submit one to another, and in that sense glorify their Lord. Now let's just take a little outline, shall we, of this church at Sardis.

There's five points I want to suggest to you in this church, as I see it at any rate, and I want you to consider this church at Sardis as we consider an army. I want you to picture in your mind joining up in the army, only in this case it's the army of the Lord. And when we come to verse 1, I want you to see the supreme commander of the army, our Lord Himself, the supreme commander.

When we come to the latter part of verse 1 and verse 2, I want you to notice the sad condition of the army, the sad condition of the army. In verse 3, the solemn command given to the army, and then in verse 4, the separated company in the midst of the army, and then in verses 5 and 6, the satisfied conquerors who have conquered in the army. Let's have a look, shall we, at verse 1 of the supreme commander, and of course this immediately goes back to what we have had in all the other churches.

Christ is put before us, and beloved, we can't emphasize this enough, can we, that we must start with Him, we must continue with Him, and we must end with Him, the supreme commander. One of the things about this particular church which is rather interesting and solemn and challenging is this. It's the first church we come to where there's no commendation.

He starts right out condemning, and that's rather unusual, which is up until now, He's commended and then He's condemned, but now He sees nothing to commend, apart from the fact that there were a few

faithful ones in their midst, which He refers to later on. Let's have a look at the supreme commander, please. I'm reminded two or three years ago of being taken over, when I was down this way of being taken over to Cape Kennedy, looking around at those various rockets that they had up there, and then going to what at one time was Mission Control or Central Control.

Taking into the building, and perhaps most of you have been there, or many of you, and noticing the tremendous panel, and realizing that sitting there in those early days, those men at Central Control were in charge of it all. Those men who were up there in the rockets, heading for the moon, had to take their command and all their instructions from Central Control. Otherwise they were in trouble.

Every movement was guided by Central Control. Every movement. Their condition, their heart condition, their pulse, their blood pressure, and then all the mechanism and everything else, all controlled at Central Control.

Beloved, Central Control is up there for us. He's the head of the church. We're the body.

He's the one that gives all the guidance, the wisdom, and the direction. And the moment we, whether as a local church or as individual saints of God, get out of touch with Central Control, get out of touch with the supreme commander, we're in trouble. The moment I take this attitude, well, I don't care what other people think, I'm going to do this, we're out of touch with the control, with the divine control.

The moment we gather as a local church and then seek to make our decisions and determine upon the basis of personalities and fleshly wisdom, we're out of touch with Central Control. And the Lord wants to get this dear church back into touch with himself. And notice how he does it.

In verse 1 he says, These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars. I know thy work, and thy name, that thou hast a name, that liveth, but thou art dead. Now, I want you to notice something that's rather interesting to me.

You go back to the first church, the church at Ephesus, and we're reminded there, you remember, he holds the seven stars in his right hand. Now, you're back to that here. He holds the seven stars.

But he's added something else now. What he has done, it seems, although it doesn't say this exactly, but the implication seems to be that in one hand he has the stars, and the other hand, he has the seven spirits. And he's kind of balancing here.

Balancing the seven spirits of the one hand with the seven stars on the other. Now, what is he trying to present to these dear people? What's the lesson he's seeking to impress them with? Because certainly the Supreme Commander is seeking to get across a lesson that they need so badly. Well, we know that the seven stars remind us, as we were noticing back on Sunday, they're a representative figure of the saints of God.

So those seven stars represent the saints of God in the Savior's hands. But what about those seven spirits? Well, we read about them back in chapter 1. We read about them again. Notice back in chapter 1, we're told in verse 4, "...jaunt of the seven churches which are in Asia.

Grace be unto you, and peace from him which is, which was, which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before the throne." And on a number of occasions throughout the book of Revelation, we're brought face to face with the seven spirits. And all Bible teachers are in agreement along this line that the

seven spirits remind us of the Holy Spirit of God. And the number seven suggests that number of completion again, that fullness.

Now, why does it say the seven spirits of God? Well, it has nothing to do with His person. There is one spirit. So we're told in the Scriptures.

But this is not dealing with His personality. This is dealing with the Spirit's mission. This is dealing with the Spirit's activity.

This is dealing with the Spirit's characteristics. Just like the sun is one, and yet from the sun comes forth various rays. Light rays, and heat rays, and healing rays, and so on.

So there are a number of characteristics of the sun, even though it's one. Just like with color. The color in name itself is one, but then there are various colors.

And so with the Holy Spirit of God, He has a sevenfold operation. Which is outlined for us, of course, in Isaiah chapter 11. Let's just turn back there for a moment.

Isaiah chapter 11. And we notice what it says concerning the branch of the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes back to rule and to reign in His kingdom. And it says in verse 2, And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.

That's number one, the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of wisdom, that's number two. The Spirit of understanding, number three.

The Spirit of counsel, number four. The Spirit of might, number five. The Spirit of knowledge, number six.

And the Spirit of the fear of the Lord, number seven. And here we have that sevenfold operation and characteristics of the Holy Spirit of God in all its completeness, resting upon our Savior as He reigns as the glorified man in the kingdom. Now when you apply that to this particular church and to our life today, and as I apply it to my life, what a challenge to me.

The Holy Spirit of God has been given to me as the believer in Christ. And you remember in the church at Corinth, and writing to that letter, in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians and chapter 3, He points out that the Holy Spirit of God is in the midst of His church, His people. Later on He tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

So the Holy Spirit is not only in us as individuals, the Holy Spirit of God is in our midst as the temple, the local church. Now He is there functioning, or desires to function, through yielded lives. He's given to me the Holy Spirit of God that I might go forth to glorify my Lord.

The Lord said, tarry in Jerusalem until ye be imbued with power from on high. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and there was tremendous power.

Later on, you remember, in Acts chapter 4, Peter and John were threatened, and being let go, the Bible tells us, they went to their own company, and they reported all that the chief priests and the elders had sent unto them. And when they had reported all, they had a prayer meeting. The church had a prayer meeting, and in effect they said, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants that with boldness we may preach thy word.

And as they prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness, and great grace was upon them all, and with great power did they give witness, and souls were saved. You see, as a result of that persecution, they began to fear, and the fear of man instead of the fear of the Lord took over. And so they resorted to prayer, and said, Lord, the threatening us grant us boldness, we're losing our boldness for thee.

And then the Holy Spirit of God filled their lives. Not that they lost the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit lost control of them. Now He got control of them again, at the yield of their lives to the Lord, and in the power of the Holy Spirit they went forth.

Now this particular church, as Sardis it seems to me, had started out under the control and power of the Holy Spirit of God. They were dependent upon the Lord. They realized their own weakness, their own nuttiness, and they went forth in strength of His strength alone.

But after a while, through the, no doubt the things of the flesh, the things of the world, and other things creeping in, they became more and more dependent upon themselves than upon the Lord, and upon the Spirit of God. And they had degenerated into a spiritual death as far as power and effectiveness was concerned. Now the Lord says, let's get back to supreme command.

Let's get back to the supreme commander. He that holds the seven spirits, He said, If I go, the Comforter will not come. But I'll send the Comforter to you, and the scent of our Lord to us.

And what is needed is this balance of a yielded life for stars, with the Holy Spirit of God, so that we can sing and say from our hearts, channels only, blessed Master, but with all thy wondrous power flowing through us, thou can use us every day and every hour. They had ceased to become a channel, and they felt they were in control. The Lord says, I'm holding the Spirit in my hand, and the stars, and we need to bring them together.

You recall in the Scriptures how so frequently we're exhorted in relation to the Holy Spirit, for example, to pray in the Spirit, the book of Jude, verse 20, I believe it is, pray in the Spirit. Not just pray, but pray in the Spirit. We're exhorted in Galatians, is it chapter 5? Walk in the Spirit.

Not just walk, but walk in the Spirit. Again in Galatians 5, be led of the Spirit. Led of the Spirit.

We find that the Apostle Paul had one burning desire in his life, to preach in the power of the Spirit. Preach in the Spirit. Not with the words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit of God.

And when he spoke to the church, and wrote to the church at first, Thessalonica, you remember, is it in verse 5? He said, Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes. He said as far as our appearance and our preaching was concerned, in the eyes of others perhaps contemptible, but he said there was a power, a power not of myself, a power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit that brought conviction. Paul was a man yielded to God and used of God.

And today, beloved, what we need is that unction from on high. We still need the power of the Holy Spirit in our life, beginning with the individual and then as the individual meets together collectively with God's people, then as the local church. And you remember in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, again we're told there's one Spirit, but many diversities, many distributions, many gifts from that one Spirit, but the one Spirit.

By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, bond or free, rich or poor. One Spirit, but all the many facets of the work of the Holy Spirit of God in our life. And so he's challenging us, beloved, for a yielded life.

A life whereby the Holy Spirit of God who is within us, not praying for the Holy Spirit, we do possess the Holy Spirit of God, but longing that the Holy Spirit might just control our lives and empower us for the glory of God. Now, we didn't get too far into this letter this morning. I want to think out again this evening.

This means that tomorrow, Lord willing, we're going to be crowding in two very challenging churches. The church at Philadelphia and the church at Laodicea. However, I trust it will be a challenge to us because the lessons in each of these churches are a tremendous challenge to me and I trust they will be to you.

Shall we bow in prayer? Our gracious Father, we thank thee this morning that thou hast in thy grace and in thy love supplied us with all that we need to be effective, to bring glory to thee, and to be a force for thy glory here in this world. Lord, it is thy desire that we might be conformed to the image of thy Son, and this by the inner working of the Holy Spirit of God. It is thy desire, Father, as a local company of thy people, as a local church, that we might know the working of the power of the Spirit of God, cleansing, knitting together thy people, and empowering us as witnesses, an effective witness for thee.

May that be true of this gathering here, this company at Pomp and Circumstance. May this church be an effective witness for thee in this area of Keystone Heights. And may each one of us as thy people, coming from various parts of the country, may we be effective witnesses for thee where thou hast placed us.

For this we pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

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