

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WILL WE BE?

The Fruit of Carelessness

TEXT: Revelation 2:18-29 and 3:1-6

INTRODUCTION: As we study the message Jesus sent to each of the seven churches of Asia, we are asking the question – What Kind of Church Will We Be?

Jesus' message to Ephesus calls us to be a church that is passionate in our love for the Lord, not one that just goes through the motions of religion.

Our Lord's message to Pergamos and Smyrna warns us not to compromise with the world, but to be willing when necessary to endure the persecution that comes to those willing to stand for Christ.

The messages of Christ we will consider today begins with the one sent to the church in Thyatira, the smallest and, in the eyes of the world, the least significant of the seven cities of the Revelation.

Thyatira is only mentioned here and in one other place in all of Scripture. It is noted as the home of Lydia, the seller of purple, whom Paul led to the Lord by the river in Philippi.

Brothers and sisters, this reminds us that we do not have to be important in the world's eyes for Jesus to take an interest in us. In fact, Jesus' message to this little town is longer than the ones to any of the other larger and more famous cities.

Revelation 2:18-29 NKJV 18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'

I. WHAT WAS THE CITY AND CHURCH AT THYATIRA LIKE?

A. The city of Thyatira was not famous, powerful, or popular.

- It was a workers' city, known especially for the production of royal purple dye.
- It was full of trade guilds.
- Lydia, whom Paul led to the Lord by the river in Philippi, was from Thyatira,

B. A church known for many good things.

Rev. 2:19 NKJV I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.

- They served the Lord, and more now than in former times.
- They were people of love and faith.
- They had endured hard times.

C. But they were careless about their teaching and they tolerated false teachers and false doctrine.

Rev. 2:20 NKJV Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

1. Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of ancient Israel, led her husband and her nation into idolatrous worship.

1 Kings 21:25 NKJV But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.

1 Kings 18 informs us that out of her wealth as the wife of the king, Jezebel supported 450 false prophets of Baal and 400 false prophets of Asherah.

2. **The Jezebel of Thyatira was teaching and leading fellow church members to participate in pagan worship sacrifices and revelry which included sexual immorality.**

3. **This was probably being done for the sake of "keeping their jobs."**

- The leadership of the trade unions were all or mostly pagans.
- They were loyal to the priests of the temples.
- They pressured people to be a part of pagan temple life.

D. She would not repent.

E. God promised destruction to her and those who follow the false doctrines she taught and encouraged.

To help us understand the significance of what was happening in Thyatira and why our Lord dealt so strongly with it, I want to share something with you out of church history.

There is a period of time that stretched nearly a thousand years that some historians label the Thyatira period of church history.

II. THE THYATIRA PERIOD: A.D. 606-1520

A. This is the period of dominance of the Roman Catholic Church over Christendom.

B. During this period, the Roman Catholic Church did many good things socially. These were the years of the formation of benevolent orders, academic orders, medical ministries, ministries to orphans and to the neglected and oppressed. These were things that were well-intentioned and were Christ-like ministries.

C. But it was also a period dominated by the development of false doctrine.

Such as

1. **That the teaching of the church is equal to the teaching of Scripture;** if the two conflict, the teaching of the church is superior.
2. **Declaring that salvation was through obedience to the pope.**
3. **Bowing before images** and paintings and praying to them.
4. Declaring the Lord's Supper to be the **Sacrifice of the Mass**.
5. **Doctrine of Purgatory** – a place in between heaven and hell where people could work off their own sins and eventually work their way to heaven.
6. **Selling Indulgences – an indulgence is forgiveness of sin.**

A Catholic priest named Tetzl was trying to raise money for the ongoing reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica by the selling of indulgences. He is remembered for his couplet: **“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”**

7. Praying through **Mary** and the saints

D. Many of those involved in the church's slide into heresy did not do it with the intent to corrupt the doctrine once and for all time given to the saints.

E. They often did so because of carelessness. They refused to examine. They chose to ignore what they knew was wrong because of the power and influence of those generating the false teaching.

- I have, in the course of my ministry been literally on both ends of the battle.
- When I entered college at a Baptist University, I was not careful at all about the doctrine I encountered. Far more concerned to nurture my pride, I joined the academically elite, and became a theological liberal, full of false teaching. I would be embarrassed to tell you some of the things I believed and didn't believe.
- God by His grace and mercy delivered me from that death trap that nearly sucked the spiritual vitality from my soul.
- Three years later, I joined the battle to try to deliver our Southern Baptist Convention agencies from this deadly malady. Nearly 20 years later, I was elected the President of the Louisiana Baptist Convention for the soul purpose of leading the battle against the false doctrine that had permeated our Baptist College.
- In the course of that battle, I met face to face some of the strongest proponents of liberal theology in our state. Some of them were vicious in their attacks. One man, in the middle of a board of trustee meeting at the college, stood up and cursed me to my face.
- In spite of their wicked fervor for Bible-denying false doctrine, I never met one whom I thought was consciously attempting to insult God or to hinder His kingdom, not even the one who cursed me.
- They just became careless and were beguiled by the world's wisdom and the devil's lie.
- This in no way excuses or justifies what they believed or the evil they inflicted upon the minds and hearts of students under their influence, but it serves to warn US. We must be careful! We must be careful to be faithful to the Word of God, to be good students of the Word, lest in our own carelessness we become attracted to the false doctrines of a Jezebel.

III. THE THYATIRA CHURCH TODAY

There is as much or more false doctrine coming from churches whose historical ancestors came out of the reformation as those whose ancestors were part of the Catholic Church.

A. Many are the churches of good works.

B. But also are many who have false doctrine. I am not talking about society but those who claim to be Christian and a part of the church.

- **Salvation by works**
- **The prosperity gospel**
- **The acceptance of homosexual lifestyle and marriage**
- **Approval of gays as pastor. Scripture says the pastor must be the husband of one wife.**
- **Approval of abortion**
- **Universalism**

C. False doctrine is often accompanied by an unrepentant heart, pride, and arrogance.

D. What will happen to these?

Rev. 2:22 NKJV Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.

E. What are we to do?

Rev. 2:25 NKJV But hold fast what you have till I come.

A short distance south of Thyatira was the city and church of Sardis.

Unlike Thyatira, Sardis was an exceedingly rich city with an illustrious past. Seven hundred years before this letter was written, it was the home of the famous King Croesus (Cre-ses), the king of Lydia who was legendary for his wealth. Five major highways intersected at Sardis, making it a huge center for trade. Luxurious meadows filled the valley around the city, providing the resources for a thriving sheep industry, joined by garment making and clothing dyes. A river ran from the mountain behind the city right through the center of the market place, and its waters carried gold dust from the hills above the city.

The wealth of Sardis, with all the luxury and splendor that it produced gave an image of liveliness to this ancient metropolis. But underneath the veneer of beauty was rotteness, decay, and death.

Unfortunately, the church in Sardis, rather than being a body which exhibited the exhilarating life of the Lord Jesus, shared many characteristics with the city itself. Hear the message of Jesus to the church at Sardis and listen for warnings from our Savior to His church today.

Revelation 3:1-6 NKJV 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: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 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. 4 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. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Many of the words of the risen Christ must have burned the ears of the members of the church at Sardis.

Jesus said, "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." During the days of the Apostle John, this ancient city lived on its reputation from centuries before. Sadly, the church within its walls, once alive with people born again through faith in Christ, now was occupied by people playing church but without genuine spiritual life.

What happened? In terms of what the specific sin was, we do not know.

- Did they lose their passionate love for the Lord Jesus like those at Ephesus?
- Did they compromise their faith like the church members in Pergamos?
- Did they tolerate false teaching as in Thyatira?

We do not know exactly what they did, but whatever it was, our Lord described it as defiling their garments, and there were only a few who were not guilty.

But while we do not know exactly what led to the church at Sardis being called dead, we have a very strong indication of how it happened. **Like the church at Thyatira, members of the church in Sardis were careless.**

- **The church at Thyatira was careless and tolerated the false teachings of that woman Jezebel, and it corrupted the church.**
- **The church at Sardis grew careless as well. That is why the Risen Lord said, "Be watchful!" and "...if you will not watch..."**
 - These words were especially painful to these church members at Sardis. They brought back the agonizing history of the famous city.
 - More than 500 years before, the King of Lydia, whose home was in the nation's capital of Sardis had attacked the army of the powerful King Cyrus of Persia.

- Cyrus pursued King Croesus to Sardis which was a fortress city built on a plateau, surrounded by steep cliffs, 1500 ft. in the air. The king, his soldiers, and all the citizens felt safe and secure in their fortress in the sky looking down on the helpless Persian troops below.
- The Persian emperor offered a great reward to any soldier who discovered a way to scale the cliffs to attack the city of Sardis. One soldier committed himself to the task, sitting and staring at the cliffs, day after day. One afternoon he saw a Sardinian soldier at the top of the cliffs drop his helmet which went plummeting down to a ledge not far from the base of the mountain. The soldier watched the soldier climb down the cliff to retrieve his helmet and then to scale the cliff back to his position at the top.
- The astute Persian memorized the path the Sardinian used to climb to the peak. That night he led a Persian platoon up the side of the cliff and into the city of Sardis. When they reached the top, they found the outskirts of the city unguarded. The height of the cliffs upon which the city was built had caused them to become careless. Because they were careless, they were conquered, and many of the citizens of Sardis were killed.
- Thus, the words of our Lord to watch carried a powerful sting for the church members of Sardis. But this was more true than we might imagine, for this strange conquering of Sardis because they did not watch, because they were careless, did not just happen once, but twice.
- Several hundred years later, Antiochus the Great, set out to attack a rebuilt Sardis, but was stymied by those same cliffs protecting the new city. One of his generals was a student of history and read the account of the Persian soldier who found the pathway to climb to the top. Knowing such a path existed, a band of Antiochus' men set out to find it, and at night they used it to scale the cliff to the top.
- Again they found the city of Sardis unguarded. Carelessness once again was the ruin of Sardis and the death of many who lived within its walls.

The church at Sardis also grew careless. That is why the Risen Lord said, “Be watchful!” and “...if you will not watch...”

Folks it is incredibly easy to become careless and let the enemy, the devil and his minions gain a foothold that can cause our garments to be defiled.

Christ said to them and to us:

“Be watchful...Hold fast...Repent.” Rev. 3:2-3 NKJV