

Rev 25-11-09a

Good morning, welcome to Sunday morning here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 9th of November 2025, Marine Corps Birthday's Eve. We continue our study in the book of Revelation.

We're in chapter 3, finishing up the church at Sardis, moving into the church at Philadelphia. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of study and fellowship and blessing in music and we'll begin. Father, what a wonderful comfort it is to know that it is not by might nor by power, but by your spirit that we live our lives, we gain understanding of your plan and purpose, of what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present, and what will happen in the future.

We thank you for this book that we have undertaken to learn more about and benefit from. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who has faithfully delivered this message to us and provided and guaranteed so many wonderful promises. We thank you for what we are about to see this morning and we ask your blessing on it.

May God, the Holy Spirit, minister it to our hearts in an effective, meaningful, and fruitful way. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading our passage, always good to get the ground under our feet firmly established. In chapter 3, to the angel of the church in Sardis, write, These things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. We are going to see these seven spirits again before long.

I know your works, that you have a name, that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, 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. 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. 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.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. We looked at this last time, and if you were creating a summary, which I encourage you to do, and which I may indeed post at some point, for the seven churches, there have been many tables created. What is the identity that the Lord Jesus gives of himself? What is the commendation? What is the criticism? What is the exhortation? What is the overcomer reward? You can find rows and columns that contain these things, but what is perhaps most telling in this particular case is the fourfold reference to names.

You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. You have a few names in Sardis who

have not defiled their garments. The one who overcomes, I will not blot out his name from the book of life, but I will confess his name before my father.

So the old question, what's in a name, is pertinent here, and there is a threefold analysis that you can make. First of all, what name do we think we have? What sort of reputation, what impression, what is our estimate of ourselves? You can look back at the previous letter to Ephesus. You have those there who say they are apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars.

That was in 2.2. In 2.9, you have those who say they are Jews and are not, and by this you get the idea that Jesus references regarding the Pharisees, that they think they are spiritual, they think they are righteous, they think they are near to God, and they are not. They are whitewashed sepulchers. They believe in the whitewash, but that's not an accurate name for what they are.

The Pharisees, the purity people, is what Pharisee means, but they're not pure. They're the opposite of what they claim to be, what they themselves think they are. So this is the first aspect of a name.

What do I think of myself? What is my self-estimate? How do I think I'm coming across to others? The second part of the name is what do others think? And there can often be quite a bit of daylight between what we think of ourselves and what others think of us. That is the reputation in the community, whether it is in the church or in the world, whether it's in our family and our circle of loved ones or our co-workers, those who come in contact with us, what is their estimate of us? If they understand that we are Christians, to what extent are we reflecting Christ? Are we representing Him as His body and shining the light of God's glory? That's what others will perceive. Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father as a result.

That's the second component of the name. The third part is God's estimate. What does God perceive? Jesus says, I know your works.

And here in Sardis, He says, you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. So the name that they give themselves, and perhaps even the name that others assign to them, is that they are alive. But the Lord Jesus' estimate is, you're dead.

You are not fruitful. You are not productive. I have not found your works, in the next verse, complete.

They're not finished. When you talk about coming to the standard of a mature man, as you read Paul, that the man of God may be perfect, it said in the Old King James, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. This is a result of the doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness that comes from God's Word, that you may be telios, complete, mature, perfect, finished, ready for use.

I love watching this British program called The Repair Shop. People bring in things that have been damaged, have suffered from age, have deteriorated, come apart, rusted away, gotten bent, tragically no longer what they once were. And these artisans and craftsmen are able to take what is left and strengthen it and reinforce it and sandblast it and prime it and paint it and clean it and repair it.

For someone like me, who is an amateur repairman, watching professionals do their work and see the materials and the techniques that they use is just really fascinating. And the end result, when they do the big reveal to the owner who comes back, it's a very powerful moment because people who think this thing has been irretrievably broken, damaged, lost, see it restored to its former glory. That's what Jesus says here.

The idea in Sardis, be watchful and strengthen the things which remain. Now this is a fascinating concept. I want you to think about this for a minute because it gets back to our constant distinction that we make between biblical theology and Calvinist or Reformed theology.

Turn back, now before we do, remember here, what is the theme? In Ephesus, the theme was love and Adam, the first Adam, got his loves mixed up. His foremost love was to be for God and that should have dominated and driven all of his goals and values and priorities. But he let his love for Eve cloud his judgment and what was the result? He lost his access to the paradise of God.

He lost his access to the tree of life. In Ephesus, they have committed a similar failure. If they recover, if they repent, they will regain, if you will, access to the paradise of God and to the tree of life, which ultimately represents love.

Jesus introduces himself in Ephesus as the one who walks among the lampstands. It's because Christ loves the church as he loves his own body, as husbands are supposed to love their wives when you go to Ephesians. And so the picture that Jesus presents of himself is of love.

He doesn't have to stand in the midst of the lampstands. He's the mighty God. He can go anywhere and do anything, but he stands among the lampstands and he holds the messengers of those churches in his hand because he loves the church.

The Ephesian letter is all about love. When you get to Smyrna, it is all about endurance under trial and persecution and suffering. It is about life and death.

Be faithful unto death, I will give you the crown of life. And Jesus introduces himself as the one who was dead but is alive. He has conquered death.

He can confer life even to those who may kill the body. Don't fear those who can kill the body. Fear him who can cast both body and soul into the hot place.

But it is about life and death. What is the level of our commitment? How do we live our lives? In

life, the people in Smyrna were pressured and poverty-stricken, but they are actually rich. To keep their focus on the spiritual treasure that they have by God's grace and don't let anything in life, even death, dislodge them from that fixed possession.

They will get the crown of life. So Ephesus, it is all about love. What do you love and what is the order? What is the priority of your love? In Smyrna, it is life and death.

And when it comes to matters of life and death, choose genuine life. Don't be fooled into thinking that this life is the place of richness or conquest or affirmation or success. It is the next life that counts when those crowns are bestowed.

We got to Pergamos and it was all about compromise. I know your works. You dwell where Satan's throne is.

You hold fast to my name and you don't deny my faith. This is their commendation. You don't deny the faith even when people are suffering for faith.

You see people being socially penalized in our day for coming out with Christian values or defending conservative virtues or a biblical worldview. It can cost them something. To not deny the faith, to not hide it or put it under a bushel basket is a wonderful thing.

Antipas died for the faith, but this did not dissuade them from their testimony. You can see parallels or illustrations perhaps in recent happenings. But Jesus says, you tolerate those who hold the doctrine of Balaam and that leads to sinful behavior.

You tolerate those who teach these things. You've accepted the teachings and you've accepted the people who teach it and you've accepted those who practice and follow this. It would be as though Balaam sends the Moabite women into the camp and you don't call it out and say, this is wrong.

This is against God's law. This should not be permitted in the camp of Israel. And because they are compromised, God can no longer fulfill the blessings that were pronounced by the very same agent, Balaam.

We've seen this. And you also have those who are Nicolaitans. They hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and you haven't called them out.

You haven't identified them. You haven't pointed out their error and you haven't separated from them and purged them out of your midst. You accept them.

You tolerate. You don't make an issue out of this evil that is clearly against God's word. So it is compromise.

It is affirmation of those who should not be affirmed. They should be rejected and there should be distance. And of course, you can tell this from Jesus' introduction of himself because he has the sharp two-edged sword and he will cleave.

If you're not going to create a distance using good judgment and you can do so peacefully and gently, but firmly, firm yet gentle. That was in a commercial of the past. Firm yet gentle.

Jesus is going to come with a sharp sword and he will cleave these people out with the word of God, with the sword of his mouth. So many connections here. In Ephesus, if they don't recover their foremost love, Jesus says, I will come to you quickly and I will move your lampstand.

I will push your lampstand out of its place. The Greek there is an action word. I will push your lampstand out.

If you can't keep it qualified to be near Christ and in the center, I will push it out. So either clean up your act or it will be cleaned up for you. Either recover your love or God's love will no longer be in full expression because you've disqualified yourself.

So many things here. Jesus in Pergamos is the one with the sharp sword and we ought to be wielding that sword ourselves with the rest of the full armor of God. You got to Thyatira and it's all about judgment.

He has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished brass. This is the heat of judgment and they have allowed Jezebel and here's another name. She says she is a prophetess, but she's not.

She calls herself a prophetess and you've allowed her to teach and seduce. This is worse than Pergamos. It's not just the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

You have this active presence of a woman. This movement has a leader and you're not calling her out. You're not pushing her out.

You're accepting of this and she teaches and seduces my servants to commit sexual immorality and eating sacrifice to idols and in the metaphorical world this is to imbibe all kinds of worldly doctrines. This is the spiritual food they eat. It is idol worship.

It is prioritizing and relying on things that secular materialists believe and think. This is your big tent Christianity and we don't care what you believe. We don't care what you prioritize.

Sure, we'll embrace your notions of righteousness and productivity and what you call love and what you give a good name to. We'll embrace it. If you say it's good, we don't really notice that God says the opposite.

You look at what the action words are for the Lord Jesus in this church we just finished in Thyatira. I will cast her into a bed. I will kill her children with death.

I will give to each one of you according to your works. I will put on you who still remain the remnant in Thyatira who do not have this doctrine and haven't known the depths of Satan. I will put no other burden on you.

Hold fast what you have till I come. There is a remnant and all you've got to do is keep on being

the remnant. Don't fall into the trap that your companions have.

If you learn to discern, if you learn to exercise proper authority in the present, I will put you in a position to exercise proper authority and discernment in the ages to come. We saw this, the wonderful truths of the Rod of Iron and the Morning Star. Here we are in Sardis and the Lord Jesus has the seven spirits of God.

Spirit is life. When it talks about the spirits who serve before the throne of God, they are living creatures. They are alive.

They perform and execute God's will. That's what life is. This isn't just clinical life or biological life or even spiritual life that you have a spirit that can move into the eternal future.

This is life in terms of its manifestation. It serves God. It pleases God.

It is the life of God. These seven spirits before his throne, these are the ones who get God's word and will accomplished. They are the agents.

That's what we want to be. We want to be agents of God's righteousness, agents of God's glory, agents of his Son, the Lord Jesus. As his body, the Lord Jesus said, I don't do my own will.

I do the will of the Father. I have come to do my Father's will. That should be us.

We should be alive to God's word and God's purpose for us. He has the seven spirits and the seven stars. He's got the word.

Last time, the word was represented by the sharp sword. This is the cutting side. This is the dividing side.

Jesus said, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. It will divide households. It will divide families.

It will divide relationships because the word of God will tell the people of God what they should and should not maintain association and relationship with. That's the cutting side. The word also has the positive side.

When Jesus has the seven stars, the seven messengers, this is the comfort. This is the encouragement. This is the instruction.

This is the wisdom that gives us what we need. Here's what I want to get to. There is an idea about life and death.

We saw life and death in Smyrna. What you do in this life affects what is going to happen in the next life. Be faithful unto death in this life, and I will give you the crown of life in the next.

But there is an evaluation, if you will. When he says, you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. We see other examples of an absolute statement that actually has exceptions.

You think of John 1. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. That's a blanket statement.

If you stop there, you would say, well, he wasn't received by anyone. His own received him not. But you go to the next verse.

This is why context is so important. But as many as received him, to them he gave authority to be called sons of God, even to those who believe on his name. So the absolute statement in the preceding verse, his own received him not, is modified by that there was a number that did receive him.

As many as received him. His own as a group received him not, but there were individuals who did. And this is the remnant.

This is the minority within a large group that are exceptions and exceptional. You see this in this passage. You have a name as the church at Sardis that you're alive, but you as a church are dead.

Nevertheless, you have a few names down in verse four who have not defiled their garments. They are alive. And that's why in verse two, he can say, be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.

They're trending toward death, but they have not yet died. You are dead, but there's still a little bit of life. I think I mentioned last time, you can look at a plant and maybe a lot of it appears dead.

You snap the twigs and they're brittle. But if you check carefully, there may still be life in the roots and it's a dead plant, but it has the potential to come back. There is actually still some life.

It's dead, but it's not totally dead. This church is dead, but not totally so. And strengthen the things which remain.

For personal application, we can think that certain elements in our life are a lost cause, but there is still life. There is still hope. Find what remains that reflects the life of God and strengthen that.

You can bring the dead plant back. It may need severe pruning. It may need a lot of care.

It may need repotting. It may need relocation. It may need a lot of TLC, but whatever life is there, you can do like the old campfire song.

It only takes a spark to get a fire burning. Just a little bit of life. If you strengthen what's remaining, you can bring it back to life.

There are areas of our life where it's largely dead, but there is a spark that can be fanned into flame. There is some life that can be strengthened. And so, this is another example of the

whatsoever things are.

We are to look at life in spiritual terms for what is still there, what is good. You look at our nation, and it is in many ways spiritually dead. It's been co-opted.

It's been pushed in strange directions. But what remains? Strengthen what remains. Don't throw up your hands and say all is lost.

Look at the flood generation. God could have said, this whole thing, I need to start over. I'll make a new Garden of Eden, a new Adam and Eve.

But God looked and saw that Noah was perfect. He was finished in his generations. He was strong in faith.

By faith, Noah, it says in Hebrews 11. And he was preserved because God strengthened what remained. He brought Noah through the judgment and blessed him and prospered him.

And he proliferates and you come down to the days of Abraham. And Abraham isn't perfect. He makes mistakes.

But God strengthens what remains. Jacob is not totally righteous, but God strengthens what remains. We need to look to ourselves and focus on the things that are working and strengthen those.

And as we do, those will replace and push out the things which are dead. Some of the dead stuff, we can prune out ourselves. Other branches in our life, God will prune so that the rest of us can be more fruitful.

This is true both individually and as a group. Jesus talking about the vine and the branches. So there is a powerful truth here.

You can be pronounced dead. Another one of my favorite programs, you know, Untold Stories of the Emergency Room. They say, well, should we pronounce? I just saw one last night where a lady went into a diabetic coma and they could not get her heart to do anything.

And it was so tedious. This went on for hours. They couldn't keep doing CPR.

They had a CPR machine. And I'd never seen one before, but it had a plunger that raised and, depressed the chest to do the compressions. And somebody had her bagged and was breathing for her and she was dead, but they didn't want to give up.

And what they were doing was keeping the tissues alive and the organs had not yet died, but the heart, there was just nothing. And so they got a bypass machine and they hooked up. They managed after somebody's been under CPR, this lady had been for two hours and her arteries had shrunk.

They were able to find the artery and put in a tube and get her on a bypass machine that would oxygenate her blood. And they dealt with the potassium poisoning that was in her bloodstream. It gave them more time and they strengthened what remained.

They brought her blood back to balance. And once they did, then they began to see some heart activity. And so then they were able to shock her heart.

The lady came back, they showed her, she got married to her fiancé. She was walking her newborn child in a buggy. And by strengthening what remained, this dead woman came back to life.

The doctors were looking at each other and said, well, I think we need to call it. We've been doing CPR for two hours. We can't get her heart to start.

And they said, well, there's an extraordinary measure. This is absolutely a Hail Mary pass. And it worked.

They took that one little potential and brought this lady back from the dead. It's incredible. This, I think, is a tribute to the way God built the human body.

If you give it half a chance, it will fix itself. It will heal itself. So verse three, remember how you have received and heard, hold fast and change your mind in Sardis.

Now notice you have a name that you're alive, but you're dead. If you're dead, how can you think and change your mind? And again, I will say for the third time, this is where the Calvinists get it wrong in Ephesians. Turn back to Ephesians chapter one.

We've talked about those that Jesus came to and did not receive him in John chapter one, but you go to Ephesians chapter one and you have that beautiful sevenfold in him that was so glorious to study. Then you get to chapter two and you have some words in italics there. You should scratch them out.

But you who were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Go down to verse four. God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us when we were dead in trespasses, verse five, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. And you say, well, see, it's all of God. You were dead.

And so God, a dead person can't think, can't choose, can't express faith. God enlivened those who are believers and brought them into faith. But if you look earlier in chapter one, go to verse 11.

In him also, we have obtained an inheritance being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things, according to the counsel of his will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. We who first trusted in Christ, this is Israel. This is the people of God who as many as did receive him when he came to his own, that's Israel.

He came to his own, his own received a nut, but there were those who did and to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, those who believe in his name. So we who were the first to trust in Christ, we have obtained an inheritance. And then verse 13, in him, you also trusted, trusted is an italics there, but that's a good helper in English.

In him, you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed you were sealed. So yes, we are dead in trespasses and sins, but we're not totally dead. We still have the power to trust.

We who were the first to trust in Christ are to the praise of his glory. You also trusted after you heard the word. This is Ezekiel prophesying to the bones.

God doesn't have to enliven the bones so that they can hear the words of Ezekiel. Son of man prophesy to these bones and the dead bones hear the word of the Lord. Remember them bones and bones and dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Even dead, they can hear and respond. And when Ezekiel prophesies, those bones are enlivened. They respond to the word.

So just because we think something is dead and this gives us hope for our loved ones and others in our sphere of relationship, co-workers, friends, those with whom we come in contact who seem to be irredeemably committed to atheism or indifference toward God. Maybe we're believers as a child and threw it all over and co-opted by the world have have gone a bad way and they seem to be dead in trespasses and sins, dead to the things of God. We should not lose hope.

Even dead bones can respond to the word of the Lord. It is only the word of the Lord that can bring life from death. This is Jesus, the first and the last, he who was dead and is alive.

And we strengthen what remains. What can strengthen what remains? Only the word of God. If you have contact with someone who is far from God, either outright unbelief or threw it all over for the ways of the world, do not lose hope.

We have a combination of exhortations. On the one hand, we are to be separate. Don't embrace, don't tolerate, don't let Balaam and Jezebel into the camp and try to love them back into doctrinal correctness or eschewing their Nicolaitan idolatrous and adulterous and perverse ways.

You don't tolerate their presence. But at the same time, we can endeavor to strengthen what remains. You can have contact that is not embrace.

You can have communication that is not acceptance and toleration. We still note the issues that are important, but when there is an opportunity to speak the truth in love, it is the sharp sword that divides, but it is also the God of all comfort who speaks life into death, who brings light in the darkness. And if there is any life hidden somewhere within the death that is evident on the

outside, the word of God will strengthen it.

When Jesus tells the Sardis church, strengthen what remains, how are they going to do that? It's the word of God. How did Jesus introduce himself? I've got the seven spirits and I've got the messengers. This is the spirit and the word.

I don't think the seven spirits are a synonym for the Holy Spirit, but they perform the same function. And the spirit or spirits of God and the word or words of God are what bring life from death, what take a spark of life and bring it back to fullness. It is the only power on earth.

You cannot persuade, you cannot argue, you cannot love, you cannot embrace, you cannot tug. There's nothing you can do except with love, inject the spirit of God and the word of God into that darkness and that death and commit the result to God. Strengthen the things that remain.

We do this in ourselves. When we're having a hard time, what is the word of God? What does the spirit of God do for us? Strengthen what remains. We can be surrounded by death.

We can be part of something that is labeled dead. Strengthen what remains. Hold fast and change your mind.

This is give up-itis in the face of, well, it's all over now. It's hopeless. We're helpless.

It's useless. No, it's not. He who holds the seven stars, he who has the seven spirits can strengthen any life that remains.

Whatsoever things are true, honest, noble, lovely, of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on that, strengthen that, encourage that, fertilize and water that, cultivate that. The things that are productive and represent God's life, that's what we need in our lives. Trim off what's dead, sharp sword.

Encourage what has any potential for life, strengthen it by God's grace, God's power, pray it in, speak the truth in love and watch and see what God does. It's encouraging. Even in a church that has a false name, there is hope.

There is encouragement and there is a reward. Your name is not blotted out of the book of life because there is life. You've brought that life back into the situation.

Your name will be confessed as a name of life, not a name of death. Wonderful encouragement. We'll pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we're going to launch into the church in Philadelphia.