



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Revelation 3:1-6

"Sardis, the Model of Past Glory"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Returning to Revelation chapter 3 and reading verses 1 through 6, which is our Lord's letter, as you know, to the Church at Sardis. The apostle writes, in verse 1 of chapter 3, of the apocalypse,

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; (Incidentally, you remember that the description of our Lord is taken from the vision of the first chapter, largely. And in the interpretation of that vision, our Lord had said that the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and so he is here set forth as the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven messengers.) I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful (Some of you have texts that read, "Wake up." Frankly, I think for our purposes at least, and probably as true to the text is the rendering, be watchful.), and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God (or completed 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 (We are taking that expression to mean believing individuals), 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. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these messages that our Lord gave to the churches that existed in the days of the Apostle John, as we read them and ponder them, we realize our appropriate they are for us in our day. And down through the centuries, how they so marvelously reflect conditions that exist in the body of Christ. And we thank Thee for this particular letter, and ask O God that by our study of it today, we might be brought to a relationship that is more infinite with Thee from Thy word. We thank Thee for our Lord's analysis of that church. We recognize so many features that apply to us as well. Deliver us Lord, from the formalities that do not have reality. We pray that we may truly have the kind of spiritual reality that we confess in our faith in Jesus Christ. Deliver us from that kind of discipleship that really is a reflection upon him, when we confess that we know him, make claims that he is our savior, and at the same time do not live as disciples of him. O God, work in our hearts. We need the ministry of the one who has the seven spirits in his hand.

And Father, we pray for this assembly of believers, for each one of them, for our elders and deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here with us today. We pray Thy blessing upon them as well. May they sense the truths of the word of God as we reflect upon them, meditate upon them, try to make them our own.

We pray for the sick. We ask, Lord that Thou will minister to them through their physicians and through their family and friends and we ask that in accordance with Thy

will, Thou will give healing. For those who are suffering, particularly, we pray for them oh Father. Work mightily in them spiritually as well as physically.

We pray for our country and for our leaders in government. We ask again that Thou wilt so work that we may have the kind of life that would be pleasing to Thee and that there would be continued opportunity to proclaim the truth of God which this country so desperately and definitely needs.

We thank Thee for the days of the past in which our country had a higher regard for the word of God even in places where there might not have been a true reception of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. We sense that those days are slipping away. We pray, oh Father, that by Thy grace there may be a return to a higher regard and appreciation of the truths of the word of God upon which is built all of the kind of life that is pleasing to Thee in heaven.

We thank Thee for the word of God, for its sufficiency for our needs, for its sufficiency as a basis of ethics that is pleasing to Thee and useful and workable in society. And then Lord, we also pray for the ministry of Believers Chapel. We pray for its radio ministry and tape ministry and publications. We pray Thy blessing upon the staff and those who work voluntarily in the carrying on of the work of the Lord. Bless each one of them, may their labors be fruitful.

We commit this meeting to Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon us as we sing together, as we reflect upon the word of God. May our day be a day in which we have made spiritual progress. Deliver us from coldness and deadness for Jesus sake. Amen.

[Message] This morning our topic as we turn to the exposition of the Book of Revelation is, "Sardis, the Model of Past Glory." A Lutheran commentator has said with reference to Sardis that it was a church suffering from spiritual dry rot and deadness. Sardis lay about thirty miles to the southeast of Thyatira, the letter that expounded last Sunday or our last time together. It was a manufacturing city whose age of greatness lay

in the past. Like city, like church. It was a church that claimed to have the truth, but the kind of life that it manifested, in one sense at least, denied its claims. As the apostle writes in 2 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 5 of those who shall characterize the last days, he says with reference to them, that they "have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof." Sardis certainly illustrates that statement that the apostle makes.

One of the things that the Christian church must content with is the fact that it is offensive to the world about it when it is true to the word of God. And really, as one of my old teachers used to like to say, "It is a terrible thing when a church is content to cultivate inoffensiveness." In other words, to try to be the kind of church that no one can really fault. Because if that is true, then we really are not giving the kind of testimony to Jesus Christ that we should. If there is one thing the Bible tells us, it is if we proclaim the cross, we proclaim that which is an offense to the natural man about us, and if live in the light of the Christian truth of the cross we also evidently will be offensive to the world about us as well. So, when a church cultivates inoffensiveness it is really doing the impossible, if it is honestly, and truly, and faithfully following the word of God.

This is the first church incidentally, without a commendation as a church. There is a commendation for some in the church, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments," but this is the first church that has no real commendation as a church. And yet again, our Lord says it is a church of works. He says again, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." As we've been saying in each of our messages, we follow the same general pattern. We will begin with a reference to the address and then move on through with the description of our Lord, the complain against Sardis, the exhortation that Jesus gives the church, a threat that he also mentions, the commendation of the remnant which is very short and very much to the point and finally, the promises with which the letter closes.

Jesus addresses the church in this way, "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write." Sardis is an interesting city, and as I suggested, its history is like the history of the

church. They both represent the same pattern of things. In fact, it was our Lord's omnipotent or omniscient choice of these churches that makes each of them in their history reflective of the spiritual truth that the letter is intended to communicate. Sardis is a city whose age of greatness lay in the past. In the 6th Century, before our Lord it was the greatest Persian city in Asia Minor. I am sure that you have heard of Croesus. Croesus was the king of Sardis. He was the one from whom we have derived the metaphor, "as rich as Croesus." [Laughter] We have had some people around Dallas of whom probably we have said, "He is as rich as Croesus." And when we say that, we are acknowledging at least that we have some acquaintance with the ancient Lydian kingdom that existed in that part of the world.

Croesus was a king who had ambitions, like most kings did, and being a very wealthy man and head of a very important city, he decided that he would also reach out and try to enlarge his kingdom. And he did that by seeking to overthrow the Persian king Cyrus. Now many of these individuals were individuals who at least had a respect for prophecy, and so Croesus according to tradition, sought an answer to what he should do from the Delphic oracle. And his answer came back from the Delphic oracle that if you cross the River Halys which separated the kingdom of Croesus from the Persian kingdom, you will destroy a great empire. He took it, of course, as a promise. It turned out to be a prophecy of his own defeat. And the Delphic oracle has had, as is usually the case, phrased the answer in such a way that it was true no matter what happened. Croesus lost and Cyrus defeated him. He was unable to take the Persians and as a result he retreated back to his city.

The city was a very difficult city to attack and overcome. At the center of it was a loft acropolis of about fifteen hundred feet high. The three sides of it were sheer cliff, a precipice that it was almost impossible for anyone to ascend. The southern side of the city was not of that type, but at least when one retreated into a place like that, it was very difficult to dislodge them. And Croesus had hopes that he would be able to survive any

kind of siege. Cyrus came, he besieged the city for about two weeks, and then he offered a reward for anyone who could devise a way by which the city might be taken. As the soldiers watched the army of Croesus, they one day noticed one of the soldiers of Croesus lost his helmet, it rolled down the side of the cliff, and then a man by the name of Hyraeades saw a Lydian soldier go down the cliff and then retrieve his helmet.

And the soldier realized that there was a way up, you might not have known it before, but it was evident that there was such a way, and so he told his superiors of what he had seen and that night they devised a surprise attack. They climbed the wall and managed to enter the city totally surprising the inhabitants of it, and they took Sardis. Well, you can I think, understand then the appeal of our Lord's letter, "Be watchful." And then again, "If therefore thou shalt not watch." What is striking about this is that later on, three or four hundred years later Antiochus the Great also took the city of Sardis by surprise in a similar way. So, Sardis is a city that needs to watch, because their past is reflective of that failure.

Now, our Lord addresses the church of Sardis as the one who possesses the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Now we have said, because this expression, the seven spirits, has occurred previously and also the stars, we have suggested that the seven spirits of God is a reference to the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his powers, and thinking that probably this particular statement is derived from the Greek translation of the Old Testament of Isaiah chapter 11 in verse 2 in which there is a reference to seven powers of the Holy Spirit. And so, when our Lord addresses the church as the one who has the seven spirits of God, we are suggesting that the reference is to him in the fullness of his power through the Holy Spirit. The seven stars are reference to the messengers to the churches, suggestive also to the fact that the church is a church that can only be reached by the sevenfold power of the Holy Spirit through individuals who are submissive to him.

Now this church, then, is what we would call a perfect model of inoffensive Christianity which had come to terms completely with the pagan environment in which it

stood. You know, we ought to stop and ask ourselves a question right at that point. Is Believers Chapel an example of inoffensive Christianity? Is it an example of a group of people who profess the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but nevertheless have come to terms with the pagan environment around us? And make no mistake about it; the environment around us is a pagan environment. We mean by that, that it is a non-Christian environment, and if it's a non-Christian environment, it's a pagan environment. Have we come to terms with it?

Do we realize that we are a people who are separate from it? We are in this world, but we are not of this world, let us remember that, always remember that. We are not of this world, though we are in this world. So, our Lord is the one who has the seven spirits and also the seven stars, and this is the solution to the problems of the church in Sardis if they respond to the word of God. It's a solution for us to, to recognize that our Lord is the one who possesses in his power the plenitude of the Holy Spirit and he is able to make, even us, effective witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the complaint against Sardis is given in three of these verses. In verse 1 he has said, "You have a name that you live, and you are dead." In verse 2 he has said, "Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die: I have not found your works completed before my God." And then in verse 4 he says, "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." One of the characteristic things of the Christian church in our day and in its more recent history is that the Christian church is a church that has been the instigator and originator of some outstanding Christian creeds.

Now remember, everybody has a creed, and in fact the person who holds up the Bible and says, "I have no creed, I simply have the Bible." Well, that's his creed. That's precisely his creed. We all have a creed, but the Christian church has been characterized by some outstanding creeds. The Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran church is an outstanding Christian statement. The Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian

churches in an outstanding statement. Other statements come to mind immediately such as the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican church, also an outstanding statement. The Heidelberg Catechism of the Reform churches is an outstanding statement. These are great Christian creeds, you should study them. You should know them. They are not creeds that were constructed by half a dozen fellows who met over the weekend in order to give us a statement, but most of those creeds were the product of the study, debate, discussion of outstanding leaders of the Christian church over, sometimes, lengthy periods of time. As you well know, some of those creeds are the product of years of study and labor by men who were very competent in the word of God.

Now, it's great to have a creed, it's very important to have a creed. I have a creed. If you ask me what my creed is, well I don't actually hold to one specific creed such as one of them, although I would not be embarrassed to hold to some of them, they are great Christian statements. But it's remarkable in our day how so many of our churches have creeds, fine creeds, but when you enter the churches of the groups, how far you have to go to find a group that really believes the creed. In other words, it's possible for us to have a great creed, and not live up to it at all. And it's possible for a person to say, "I don't have a creed, I just have the Bible." And not live up to the Bible at all. So what we have in Sardis is a dead church with an outward sound view of the word of God, so far as we know. Our Lord writes to them then as those who have attached themselves to the apostolic statements, the belief of the Scriptures as they had them at that time. But nevertheless, in such a church, the gospel was really in a coffin. That's unfortunate. That's very unfortunate in a church, and particularly in a church that professes to believe the great facts of the Christian faith. Our Lord says about them, "You have a name that you live, but you are dead."

The scaffolding is there, worship, prayer, hymns, ordinances, gifts, no doubt all of those things were part of the church of Sardis. But believers met on the Lord's day, the observed the ordinance of the Lord's supper so far as we know, they honored the

Scriptures as they had heard them, and surely honored the words of our Lord as they knew them, they sang hymns, and they gave gifts. They gave of their substance, but the things that they did were things that did not reach reality. In other words, they worshipped, but their worship did not reach heaven. They prayed. Their prayer did not effectively reach heaven.

They sang hymns, but they sang hymns just as hymns, not expressive of the great truths in reality that those hymns represented. I grant you today it is hard, with so many of the hymns that are being sung today, to find any truth that is great at all in them. They are almost always simply praise, thanksgiving. That's it. Not thanksgiving for the great truths of the Christian faith, specifically, for they are not in our hymns. They are light and shallow and superficial. But in that day as in ours, it is possible to even use terms that are great and the reality is no longer there. When a person looks at a sepulcher and finds it white and admires the whiteness of the sepulcher, well that may be a religious form of a kind, but if dead bones are in it, that's all that it really is. So, our Lord says, "You have a name that you live. You are dead."

That's something that each of us should ask ourselves. We have a name as a Christian, as a believer, but is there vital spiritual life within us. That is the first thing which our Lord has to say to this church by way of complaint. We know that the reformation in the vitality of the discovery of the great truths, such as the justification by faith, before long lapsed into orthodox formality. Someone has said, "The orthodox formality of denominationalism's clanging Ecclesiasticism," and we have had that down to our present day. The reformation, what magnificent things happened then. The church was offensive, and as a result of being offensive, they were truly representing our Lord Jesus Christ and many were responsive to it as the Holy Spirit worked.

I have a friend who is now with the Lord. He used to like to say, "We are sound, sound asleep." No offense to the two or three of you who are kind of sleeping away now. [Laughter] But at any rate, that's the first thing that our Lord says. And then he says

in the 2nd verse, "Strengthen the things which remain that are about to die." These are words that are used of an orthodox church, not an apostate church. If it were not orthodox, there would be nothing that remained to be strengthened. The words refer to the forms to be filled by this work of the Holy Spirit. That is, they at least have that. They are a dead church, but they at least have the forms. They have the things that might be filled. They do gather on the Lord's day. They do observe the ordinances. They do pray. They do preach the word, to some extent, but everything is empty. So, our Lord says, "strengthen the things that remain." There are some things that do. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The foundations were still there in Sardis, it appears.

Our Lord also says thirdly, "I have not found thy works perfected," or completed, "before God." There is a discrepancy between the promise and the performance of the things that were their works. Easy going tolerance had produced an empty shell in the church. So when they prayed, their prayers were just prayers, the kinds of prayers that people read behind the pulpit, the kinds of prayers that people read from a book. I often, in the past, have conducted funerals in which men from the Masons or from some of the denominations participate in the service. I am always kind of appalled at what happens. We gather around the tomb and someone reaches in his pocket and pulls out a little book and opens it up and reads something as if we were reading a lesson in school, not Sunday school, but in school or something like that. It has no meaning, it's obvious, and then says a quick prayer which already written in his book, and that is supposed to be a spiritual work, but it's not. "Strengthen the things that remain. I have not found your works fulfilled." Empty shells, prayers, songs that are sung, but they are not songs that really flow out of an appreciation of the word of God.

I must say, there is one thing I like about Believers Chapel, when we sing hymns; it does seem to me that you are singing from your heart appreciating the words that you are singing. Of course, I would like if anything, for us to sing even more significant

hymns that have some even sounder and deeper doctrine and we do that from time to time. But I love that, and I love the response, because it indicates that there is some reality. I can see people sing and there is no reality whatsoever in what they are singing. It's just words. It's just a tune, the kind of thing that the world likes with its songs. These individuals were giving gifts, but they were not gifts to further the work of the Lord in the truest sense. That's why we give. We give out of appreciation for what our Lord has done for us spiritually, and we do it with the view that this will be something that will be helpful in the spread of that word which has meant so much to us. To give in order to be regarded as meeting obligations is just exactly what Sardis may have been doing. It was a name that they were living up to, but they were really dead.

And finally, he says in the 4th verse in this complaint, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." It's very clear from that word defiled, that there were many who had, that they had defiled their garments. And in fact in that word defiled, there is something of a clue to the problem of Sardis. Behind the piety, which was evident, for they prayed, they sang, they gave gifts, they met, they observed the ordinances, but behind the piety, there was death. In other words, the piety was sin. Death is dirty, that's what our Lord is suggesting.

To be dead is to be in sin, and so Sardis needs an exhortation from the Lord. That follows in the five imperatives that call for vigilance. I will pick them out; verse 2, "Be watchful." That was so meaningful for Sardis. They had lost their city's importance and prominence by not being watchful. Second, "strengthen" or establish the things that remain. That is, the forms you have fill the forms with the reality; the reading of the Scriptures, the preaching of the word, preaching vitally, praying, praying vitally in reality. Giving, all of the things that pertain to spiritual things, but in reality. And then thirdly, verse 3, "Remember how you have received the truth and the time when you did. Hold fast and repent." All five of these imperatives express vigilance, that's what they needed

to turn from their lethargy, to vigilant activity in the spiritual realm, to establish or to strengthen, that is fill the externals with the reality that ought to be there.

I have a friend, and he's still a friend, but he's been with the Lord now for probably ten or fifteen years, remarkable man, Dr. Northcote Deck. He came from a New Zealand family that had been responsible for the South Sea Evangelical Mission, and for those of you who go as far back as the second World War, you may remember that when our forces were in the Solomon Islands, many of our men in the Armed Forces were converted, converted through the natives, converted through the Solomon Islands natives. And the reason for that is that Dr. Deck's family had been responsible for the establishment of that mission which was a mission to minister to the Solomon Islands. And Dr. Deck spent many, many years, most of the years of his active Christian life until about age sixty, sixty-five, on a boat in which, while they had head quarters in one of the islands, they spent their time going from island to island evangelizing and forming churches. And they formed many churches in the Solomon Islands. It is very thrilling to hear Dr. Deck tell of their experiences.

In the later years of his life he used to come to Dallas. He would frequently speak to the students at the theological seminary. He was an older man, but he always made a great impression upon them, because they sensed the reality that characterized his life. He has a couple of little books and they are rather interesting books, because they are filled with stories from his own experience as a Christian. Well Dr. Deck, incidentally, comes from a family, in which there were some hymn writers, and in our Hymn Book that we sing around the Lord's Table, you will see some of the hymns of, I believe it was, J.G. Deck, and that's Dr. Deck's family. And in fact, his aunt was the one who started the mission, and result has been many, many people brought to the Lord.

Dr. Deck, in one of his books describes, the Island Blanket of the Solomon Islands. Oh by the way, I should have mentioned this, Dr. Deck, because he grew up ministering like that, later on he was a popular speaker at Christian conferences, and one

year he was a speaker at a conference that I was a speaker at in Canada and we went up in the north above Toronto about a hundred and fifty miles to a little island. It was about a mile and a half around the island. And it was in July, August, and many people thought that it would be nice to bring your bathing suit at that time so you could swim, and if you didn't know anything about the waters of those lakes in the northern part of Ontario, you brought your bathing suit and unfortunately you dove in without testing the temperature of the weather first, and you came up hardly able to speak. I used to come down, I had once spent two months at a camp in northern Wisconsin, so when I went down I put my foot in first and the consequence was, it took me half an hour to get in the water.

[Laughter] But Dr. Deck used to get up every morning before breakfast and swim around the island, and he was seventy years of age at that time. He told me one time in Birmingham, Alabama, that he got up every morning and he always had a cold shower every morning. I was about twenty-five years of age at the time, and he said, "Now Lewis, don't you do it, because you couldn't take it." [Laughter]

But at any rate, Dr. Deck tells about the island blanket and in those little huts in which most of the islanders lived, the way they kept themselves reasonably warm at night was to have an island blanket. And that consisted of four logs, which each would have by his bed, and Dr. Deck said, "Many, many a night sleeping in those cabins, in those homes with those islanders, I had one and they had one, and I would awaken when one of them would get up and fan his blanket into flames again." There were four logs that they placed just like an "X" so that the ends came together and they would get them going, and then lie down and sleep and of course what would happen would be that soon, after the wood that was close together had burned, then the fire would die down, they would be cold, they would awaken, get up, push the logs together again, then blow on the logs, fan them into flame again, and then lie down again. And he said sometimes that was done four or five or six times during the night. Dr. Deck said that was what Paul was talking about when he said, "Stir up the gift of God which is within thee."

And he went on to talk about the fact that there are certain laws of the body as well as certain laws of the souls. And the law of the body is that our body gets cold during the night. That's why during the night you have to pull up the cover. But the same thing is true of the soul. The soul, if there is not the constant fanning of the flames of the spiritual life, we get cold too. There's the law of coldness that is a tendency within us, this cooling tendency. It is true of our spiritual lives if we do not spend time with the word of God, if we do not spend time in prayer, if we do not spend time in pondering the things of the word of God, we will become cool and ultimately cold.

One of the great things of the Christian truth now is the fact that we do not lose our eternal life if we have once obtained it, but it is very possible for us to become cool and ultimately become cold. So, Dr. Deck reminded us of the fact that it is very important for us to fan the flame of the word of God by means of constant prayer and fellowship and communion with the Lord. He also mentioned the fact that if a rock ever rolled down in the midst of your fire that might be likened to sin itself and one must remove the stone or the rock, if the flame is to be continued at all. So, stir up the gift of God which is in thee. Our Lord's words remind me of that when he says that we are to be "watchful, to strengthen, to remember, to hold fast, and repent." How important that is. If you are neglecting prayer, you are growing cold. If you are neglecting the word of God, there is a cooling tendency that is characteristic of the Christian life. It always is true. Neglect the spiritual exercises and coolness and coldness will inevitably come.

Now our Lord threatens this particular group, he says of them in the 3rd verse, "if therefore you will not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Isn't it a striking thing that that which should be a great anticipation and hope for us, the coming of the Lord, is also, if we are not responsive to the things of the Lord, the basis of a threat. He will come, not as a bridegroom, but as the thief. That which is designed to be a blessing will be a bane.

The commendation of the remnant is given in the 4th verse. "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." And then finally, the promises in verses 5 and 6, a threefold promise, he states, "He that over cometh," that is the true believing man, "the same shall be clothed in white raiment." White is a biblical term that has various meanings. Sometimes it has to do with that which is simply festive, and other times it has to do with a victory such as a military victory, and other times it has to do with that which is pure. So it can represent purity. I would suggest that probably it does represent something like purity here and specifically that what may be in our Lord's mind is the righteousness that is ours through justification by faith. So, I'll just call it imputed righteousness that comes by faith. In the seventh chapter in the 14th verse we read, "And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And so I would suggest to you that the whiteness there is designed to represent that which is the saving ministry of Christ, the imputed righteousness which is ours through faith when we have believed in Jesus Christ. In other words, it represents the matchless robe, which far exceeds what earthly princes wear as someone has put it. Then secondly, he states in the 5th verse, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." I think that really suggests the kind of security we have as true believers. "I will not blot out his name from the book of life."

There has been a great deal of speculation over the meaning of the term book of life. It is true that in ancient times, cities like Sardis, for example, had a civic register and everyone who was born in Sardis had their name inscribed in the civic register. The only way you could lose your name in the register, have it blotted out, was by some crime, some treachery that was worthy of it, and then your name might be erased from the book. But our Lord's specific statement of the book of life is a bit difficult. Some have said that everybody's name is written in a book of life and that as an individual passes out of this

existence never having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is God who blots his name out of the book, and ultimately at the end what we have in the book of life is the same register of names that is found in the lamb's book of life, an expression that is also found in the word of God. Perhaps, that is true.

That's really somewhat unimportant it seems to me, what our Lord is saying is that the one who overcomes will not have his name blotted out of the book of life. That true, believing man, he shall know what is meant by the preservation and the security reflected in our Lord's great promise, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. That is the believer's anchor in the experiences of life. I know that having believed in our Lord Jesus Christ and having through the work of the Holy Spirit come to an understanding of what has transpired, and having come to an infallible possession of the conviction that I belong to him, I know that that is a relationship that is eternal. "I will not blot out his name from the book of life."

And finally, "But I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Mr. Newell used to like to say, "I'm not ashamed to confess Christ, but my wonder is, how can he ever confess me?" Every believer feels something like that. But I will confess his name. That is, obviously, something that goes back to the words of our Lord which he ordered when he was here upon this earth in chapter 10 and verse 32 of the Gospel of Matthew. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." What kind of church then was Sardis? Sardis was a church afflicted with dead orthodoxy.

There are degrees of peril as has often been pointed out, and the different kinds of peril that we must exist with are such degrees as persecution, that's very dangerous. Some turn apostate in persecution. Heresy is worse. Often many are deceived, but worst of all is the dry rot from within; the whole church dying from within as a church; the lethargy that means that there is no heresy. Who would bother with a church that is lethargic, a dead church? You usually don't find heresy in a dead church, because they

just don't go together. Heresy goes where there is some life, and so lethargy produces the kind of church that is so ill and sick that even heresy cannot find a home there.

Neutrality also is the kind of condition in which individuals are not really concerned about it at all. The church that is lethargic, the church that is neutral, it just kind of sits there. It's on the point of dying.

What kind of church do you think Believers Chapel is? It's possible you know that our own ardor might be cooling. It's possible that as a church we are on the way to the condition of the church at Sardis. That's something that we have to ask ourselves. But let's forget the church for a moment; let's ask ourselves, where do I stand? Is the cooling process going on? If it is we need to listen to our Lord's words. We need to wake up, to strengthen the things that remain, to remember how we received our Lord and the blessings that have become ours as a result of that, to hold them fast and to repent, to turn from the things that have turned us away from the Lord. And by God's grace relying upon him to do things that are worth of our repentance. What we need is expansion from within, new births, not simply a new church, edification, expression of love to the lost.

A church should be an asylum, I don't mean composed of crazy people, in one sense, yes, but an asylum, a place to which we can escape, a refuge, a welcome place for those broken by the experiences of life, enslaved by sin, lost, not knowing which way to turn. And it should be, of course, a church in which there is an expression of an important part of our human nature, an expression of emotion. There is nothing wrong with emotion. We don't want to let the Charismatics think that they are a group that has a lock on all Christian emotion. They do not. Genuine emotion is part of our Christian life. Of course, our emotion should be based upon the truth and the truth of our intellectual comprehension of the gospel is fundamental, but out of that should flow an enjoyment of the things of our Lord and an openness to others and a help of them. The refinement that refuses to relieve is nothing more than cultured paganism, someone has said.

One final word, for our time is up. There is a word for those who are not Christians at all, a word to the unsaved. I can't think of any word on which to end this than on the word of John Calvin. Mr. Calvin said with reference to those who are mere professors, not true possessors, who have a name but yet are dead, "They shall walk in black for they are unworthy." May God help us to remember that.

If you are here today and you've never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, he has offered the atoning sacrifice by which you may wash your robes white, through that blood of the lamb, and may have the confidence that you will walk with him in garments of white, belonging to him. May God touch your heart and may, if that condition of deadness really is your condition, may you flee to the cross; receive the gift of eternal life by virtue of the blood that was shed there for sinners. May God enable you to claim the forgiveness of sins which is available there. And for those of us who are believers, who say we are Christians, may God help us to respond to the message of the church at Sardis. Be watchful, strengthen the things that remain, hold fast, remember, and repent. Christian repentance is so important. May God help us. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the words that our Lord spoke to the church at Sardis, because we see that so often those words are truly applicable to us. Lord, may those island blankets of the natives of the Solomon Islands speak to us of our need, too, of being sure that we have the warmth that comes from a close relationship to Thee. Enable us, oh God, to stir up that which thou hast implanted within us that we may faithfully represent our Lord. Go with us now as we part in Jesus' name. Amen.