

The Things Which Are: Part 2

This chapter is a continuation of Christ's message to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. It will cover the remaining four churches - Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

The Message to the Church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

The message to the church at Thyatira begins in verse 18 with a reference to the vision of Christ that John saw in chapter 1. The commendation to this church begins in verse 19: **"These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass. I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience, and as for your works, the last are more than the first."**

Perhaps the reference to the "eyes like a flame of fire" alludes to Christ's anger against the sin in this church and to His penetration through the good they were doing to the sin beneath.

Jesus said He was aware of their works and their service brought about by love. He further commended them for their faith and patience, and the works they'd done seemed to be improving since there were more at the last than at the first.

However, Jesus had a real problem with the church at Thyatira. In verse 20, **He says: "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols."**

The story of Jezebel can be found in 1 Kings 16 - 2 Kings 9. She was a pagan queen, but she was married to a king of Israel - Ahab. From her queenly throne, she manipulated, dominated, and controlled Ahab. She had people murdered; she had people committing immorality; she had people worshiping false gods. Through the controlling, dominating spirit of this woman, she led the people of Israel down a primrose lane to judgment.

Jesus said of the church at Thyatira that they had allowed somebody - a person with the spirit of Jezebel - to come into the church. This individual was controlling, dominating, and manipulating. The bottom line is that the spirit of Jezebel was a spirit of occult, bondage, and domination, and it had its source in the way Satan operates. He operates from a position of espionage and manipulation. In essence, Jesus said, "I will not condone that in My church. I will not tolerate controlling spirits or power cliques in My church.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "I will not tolerate Jezebelism. Neither will I support people who allow it to happen." The leadership of the church at Thyatira allowed this person to talk over and dominate.

Jesus wants the church to deal with this evil. The church at Thyatira let it get out of hand. It was the leaders' fault, because they had allowed this sin to take place. People can blame Jezebel all they want, but it is not all Jezebel's fault. The devil will take over anytime people let him. The Enemy will do anything people allow him to do.

Church leaders must stand up in the name of Jesus, take their authority, and say, "This church will not tolerate idolatry or immorality! Neither will this church allow techniques

of cliquishness, manipulation, or domination.” In the family of God, believers should not have to manipulate and play petty games, because in Christ, everyone is the same.

The church today needs to hear this message. Christianity is not about social power. It is about lordship. The church at Thyatira *had allowed a person to take over the church* who was leading the church astray. Jesus said, “**I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent; she will be judged. But to you...[who are not guilty]...hold fast**” (vv.21,24-25).

The Message to the Church of Sardis (3:1-13)

The message to the church at Sardis begins in Revelation 3:1. Sardis is a church that was alive, but Jesus said, “You’re dead.” The message begins:

These things say 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. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain...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” (vv.1-4).

This church was busy and active. They had meetings galore, organization plus, and image beyond compare. The membership was like a beehive. Jesus said, “You have a game that you are alive, but you do not know that you are dead.” However, there were some people in the church at Sardis who were not defiled. **God always has a faithful few - a remnant - who have not stained their garments.** James says that “pure and undefiled religion” is keeping “Oneself unspotted from the world” (1:27).

To those who have been faithful, Christ gives a threefold promise. First, they will be clothed with white garments. The color white always stands for purity. In fact, in the Beatitudes, Jesus said, “**Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God**” (Matthew 5:8). To the believers at Sardis who had not defiled their garments, Jesus promised: “They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4).

Second, Jesus said to the overcomers at Sardis, “I will not blot out [your names] from the Book of Life” (3:5). Historians say that in the ancient world, the ruler of a kingdom kept a register of all citizens. If a citizen committed a crime against the state, his name was erased from the register. **If one’s name is written in the Book of Life, then he or she is numbered among the faithful citizens of the kingdom of God.** What a wonderful promise this must have been for the faithful few in the Sardis church. Thankfully, that same promise is extended to the faithful believers of all generations.

Third, Jesus said He would confess their names before His Father and the angels (v. 5). This promise to the faithful in Sardis is a reaffirmation of the same promise Jesus made to the disciples in Matthew 10:32-33 and Luke 12:8-9. Jesus will always be true to those who are true to Him.

The majority of the church at Sardis, however, had defiled their spiritual garments. There was impurity in their lives. Jesus was making the connection between purity and life. **It seems that Jesus was saying that spiritual rigor mortis sets in when God’s people begin to dabble in**

improper attitudes and impure behavior. He said “defiled garments,” which means that something they were doing was defiling them. **In other words, it does not matter how active a person is in the church, if there is impurity in his life, he is dead internally.**

Activity without purity is futility. Even when one is busy in church things, it is not about “busy;” it is about living a life of holiness and purity before God. **If a believer is not pure and holy, he can be active and busy, but he can be spiritually dead.** For example, when Delilah shaved Samson’s head (see Judges 16:20), he ran out to shake himself as at other times, but he did not know that the Spirit of God had departed from him.

Many people today are shaking themselves in activity, and they do not realize that the anointing, power, and the presence of Almighty God have departed. Some people have become professionals and they know which buttons to push, but they are not aware that their spiritual power is missing. It takes spiritual power to lift the load; it takes spiritual power to forgive the sin; it takes spiritual power to heal the sick; it takes spiritual power to put the devil on the run; it takes the Spirit’s anointing to live a holy life. People can deceive other believers and even their spouses, but they cannot deceive Him. He sees the defiled garments. And where they are defiled, death is moving in, and rigor mortis is not far behind.

Christ gave this church four specific directions. He said:

1. **“Remember...**how you...received and heard [the gospel].” They were never to allow themselves to forget what Christ did for them.
2. **“Repent.”** This is a definite action. In the believer’s life, there must be a decisive moment when he individual decides to end the old ways and begin a new direction with Christ.
3. **“Keep”** the commands of the gospel. This direction is also a definite action. It means to never stop keeping these commands. Too many Christians are fervent day and apathetic the next.
4. **“Watch”** is the fourth directive given to the church at Sardis. This command was also given to the disciples in **Matthew 26:41**: **“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”** God’s people need to always be alert, sober, and vigilant.

History reveals an interesting story about the city of Sardis. In 546 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia laid siege to this city during the reign of Croesus. Cyrus waited for 14 days to find a way to attack the city. Finally, he offered a reward to anyone who could find a way to enter the city which was 1,500 feet high and protected by precipitous rock cliffs. One day, a Persian soldier happened to see a Sardian soldier drop his helmet over one of the ledges. The Persian soldier watched as the Sardian made his way down through a crack in the rock to recover his helmet. The Persian soldier quickly relayed this incident to King Cyrus. Later that night, Persian soldiers climbed to the top through that same crack in the rock. When they reached the top, they found it unguarded. Consequently, Sardis fell to Persia.

Believers should take note that the “crack” in Sardis’ spiritual defense was obviously due to some kind of internal defilement. Most of the church had defiled their garments. **A church can have both purity and activity, but a church of activity without purity is only futility to Christ.** The church at Sardis did not repent, and today there is nothing but ruins. This church could have made a difference, but she died of indifference.

The church is not called to be an organization, but an organism - alive with the life of Christ. The church is not to be a country club or an entertainment business; in fact, the world is

tired of the church trying to run a third-rate amusement park. The church is not a showboat; it is a lifeboat. Without the wind of the Holy Spirit pushing its sails, it is dead in the water.

The Message to the Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

The next church is the church at Philadelphia. The word Philadelphia means “the city of brotherly love.” **Philadelphia was the only other church out of the seven that was not condemned for something.** Smyrna was the other church. They were good, but they suffered. In fact, God did not find one thing wrong at Smyrna, and their reward was suffering. Jesus told them that it was going to be so bad that some of them would even give their lives. Conversely, **at Philadelphia, Jesus did not have one bad thing to say, but their reward was an open door - success.** Their success for their testimonies and their ministries was that their enemies were going to come and bow at their feet, and the church would be vindicated. That is what He said to the church at Philadelphia.

This seems unfair. One good group suffers while another good group succeeds. Why the difference? **Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that in all believers’ lives, there are times of both suffering and success.** There were probably times at Smyrna when they had good days. There were probably times at Philadelphia when they had bad days. So, there is a message here that says life moves in cycles. But whether one is suffering or succeeding, faithfulness is the answer. There are people who can handle suffering much better than they can handle prosperity. For some people, if times are hard, they can say, “To God be the glory.” But when times get extremely good, they forget God. Adversity sometimes brings things out that prosperity hides. What Jesus is saying here is whether one is suffering or succeeding: Be faithful.

A warning was given to this church in **verse 11: “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” In actuality, it is not a question of someone stealing their crown, but of God taking it from them and giving it to someone else if they were not faithful.**

Esau lost his place to Jacob

Reuben lost his place to Judah

Saul lost his place to David

Judas lost his place to Matthias

the Jews temporarily lost their place to the Gentiles.

What a tragedy. However, the church at Philadelphia had kept His word (3:8).

To those in Philadelphia, things could not be better. They should never think that they had opened a door of blessing. Jesus said, **“I have opened the door and no man can shut it, and when I close the door, no man can open it”** (see v.7).

There are several dynamics of open doors. Paul experienced such an open door at Ephesus. He wrote the following in 1 Corinthians: **“But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries”** (16:8-9). Open doors are divinely opened, and God’s timing is essential. The open door depends on God’s perspective, but the people must be godly and prepared.

When doors are opened one should be prepared for adversity from Satan. Paul fought with “beasts” at Ephesus (see 1 Corinthians 15:32) and was surrounded by a culture of heathenism. Those who walk through open doors encounter face-to-face opposition.

Open doors require determined optimism and tenacity. Paul determined that he would “seize the moment,” no matter the cost. He made tents pastored, planted a church, and carried a heavy burden of responsibility. However, in the end, there was triumph. **Acts 19:20 says, “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”**

God’s people need to remember that the issue is not just success or suffering, the issue is faithfulness. If the believer is suffering, Jesus says, “Be faithful.” If the believer is succeeding, Jesus says, “Be faithful.” God’s people need to hear this. They must never take Christ Jesus for granted. They should stay humble at His feet. The ax cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It is only effective as it is used in the hand of the master woodsman. Jesus is Lord! He is the giver of blessings! He is the keeper! He is the sustainer!

The Message to the Church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

The last church is the church at Laodicea. Jesus said, **“Because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth” (v.16).** Jesus is saying He cannot use a complacent person, or someone who is oblivious to the fact that he is poor, naked, wretched, and blind.

If a person has lost passion, Jesus gives four steps for recovery. First, He says, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (v. 18). What is gold refined in the fire? First Peter 1:7 says, “The trial of your faith [is like gold refined] with fire” (KJV).

If believers have lost their passion, they can recover it with a renewed faith.

Let me tell you a story about faith. A young man named Matthew lost his class ring. The church staff went out to look for Matthew’s class ring that was blown away in the tornado. They were looking around, and one young man names Craig said, “I’m just going to pray or God to help me to find it.”

The staff said, “Yeah, right.”

About five minutes later, Craig walked up with the class ring!
Do you want your passion back? Get back to faith!

Second, Jesus said “[Come to Me] and buy...white garments.” White garments symbolize righteousness, purity, and holiness. In other words, if believers have lost their passion, they need to come back to a pure, holy, and righteous life. They will find passion from faith and purity.

Third, He said that one can get passion back through anointed vision. He said, **“Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see” (v.18).** The Holy Spirit’s anointed vision does not come until first there is faith and purity. Then comes the vision.

Fourth, Jesus said, “Behold I stand at the door and knock” (v.20). This verse is addressed to the church. Jesus is locked outside the church. The church pushed Him out, closed the door, and there is no knob on it! Jesus is standing, knocking at the door.

To the church at Philadelphia, Jesus said, “If I open a door, you cannot close it. If I close it, you cannot open it.” Conversely, if the church closes it, He will not open it. He is sensitive about the human will; He will not violate it. He said, in essence, “I will not open your door if you close it. I respect your will too much. And if you love Me, I want you to love Me out of your choice, not out of My force.”

So, how does one get his passion back? He starts by building his faith, working on his purity, seeking God’s vision, and by opening the door saying, “Come in, Lord Jesus.”

The messages to the seven churches can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Ephesus - Backsliding through abandoned affection**
- 2. Smyrna - Faithfulness through personal tribulation**
- 3. Pergamos - Immorality and idolatry through doctrinal perversion**
- 4. Thyatira - Bondage through personality seduction**
- 5. Sardis - Death through human organization**
- 6. Philadelphia - Success through divine intervention**
- 7. Laodicea - Rejection through complacency.**

The church was no afterthought to Christ. He will bear the purchase marks in His glorified body forever. Christ’s passion for people demands a people of passion. This is His last message to His church, and today’s believers make up the last of His church. God’s people should be faithful and watchful so they can be counted among the overcomers.