

The Dying Church

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[0 : 00] This is an apocalyptic literature. Excuse me. So we have seven churches, seven lampstands, seven angels. Right? We've got lots and lots of sevens. We're going to have seven seals, seven bowls, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Seven. What's seven about? Well, seven is a number of perfection. It's a number of completeness. There are seven days in a week. That's a complete week. That's a full unit. So in Genesis 1, right? First day, second day. And then he rested on the seventh day. That's it. That's the end. That's the complete. So it's a complete. So when he's talking about seven churches, he's talking about not just those seven churches as if they were the only ones that existed, as if Jesus had no message for any other church.

There were lots of churches. He doesn't talk about the church of Ephesus or Corinth or Thessalonica, any of those. So seven means these seven are representative of all churches. And they're not just representative of all the churches in the first century. They're representative of all churches in all time. Because we can read these and go, oh, I know a church like that.

[1 : 03] Oh, I've been in a church like that. Oh, I wish I was in a church like that one. Right? So seven. So seven spirits is really saying fullness of spirit, completeness of spirit.

So what's seven spirits? Not seven individual spirits, but a sevenfold spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit. The fullness of the spirit. Okay?

Jesus is the one who sends the spirit to the church. Remember, he said, I go away. I will send another to you. I will send another just like me. I will send the helper, the Holy Spirit, to you when I go.

In fact, it's to your advantage that I go away because then you'll have the Holy Spirit always with you. So it's the spirit. Now, how does the spirit relate to the lampstands? Well, remember, the church stands for the lampstand.

On top of the lampstand is what? Light. A lamp. Okay? The church is not the lamp. The church is the lampstand. So who's the light?

[2 : 09] Who's the lamp? Who's the burning force? Who's the life of that lampstand? The spirit. Okay? So the seven spirits that enliven, that give life to the church.

This is a dying church that needs the life of the Holy Spirit. This is a church that has lost its spiritual life.

This is a church that needs revival, renewal, awakening. I think that this is a church that's not walking with the spirit.

They had before. And now they're cruising. Now they're walking in their own strength. Now they're just kind of doing things according to their own ability. Instead of, like Jesus said, right?

Abide in me and you shall bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing. Oh, you might do things, but you're doing them in your power. They're not real fruit.

[3 : 16] Real fruit comes from me through you. It's not the fruit of Bill. It's the fruit of the spirit, right? It's Bill depending on, leaning on, walking with the spirit that brings love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.

Did I say the P word? You know, patience was the P word, by the way. You missed it. So what does Jesus say to them?

Verse, the end of verse one, right from the get go. I know your works. Now we expect some commendation. I know your works. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die. So he says you're dead, but not totally. There's actually some remaining life there that you can still strengthen. And I have not found your works complete. So what's his confrontation?

[4 : 20] Well, here's the sleeping servants. Jesus is unveiling their true condition. Though on the outside you look alive. Though you do in that city have a name. You're the church of Jesus Christ in the city of Sardis.

You have a name. You have members of that church. You have people, you have activity. You have things going on. But when Jesus looks with his gazing, with his blazing eyes and sees through the wrapping, he sees that there's no spiritual life.

There's no spiritual life left in this church. You have a name. So in verse 1, it says you have a reputation. The Greek word is name.

And name is your reputation. In the Bible, people were given a name and that was their identity.

You shall call his name Jesus. Yeshua. Why?

Because he will save Yeshua. Yahweh saves. He will save his people from their sins. Right?

Abraham is called father of many people.

[5 : 32] You should call him Isaac because you laughed when I said he would be born. Isaac means laughter. Call him Jacob because he comes out grabbing the heel and that's what he will be like all of his days.

He'll be a heel grabber. He will be a trickster. He will be a manipulator. Right? So name is a reputation. Name is who you are. So he says you have a name.

You have a reputation. You have an identity, but really you're dead. You're like the Pharisees.

Jesus said the Pharisees, right? You're like whitewashed tombs. Oh, you're all nice and pretty on the eye.

You dress yourself all up, say all the right things. You look all right. You do the right things. But inside, see, I can see inside of you and inside you're full of dead man's bones and death and deception and hypocrisy.

So Jesus sees right through. And here's a church that looks okay on the outside. Maybe it's full. But no spiritual life.

[6 : 37] You're about to die. He says you're dying. You have a tad bit of spiritual life left. Maybe what he means is you're half-hearted in your work. Maybe he means that they're just kind of on cruise control.

You ever been there? I've done that. You're just like, I'm tired. I'm just going to cruise for a while. I just need to cruise. Tired. Maybe they're just cruising. It's like, I'm okay.

Just cruising. There's, and yet, in the book of Hebrews, we learn that there's no such thing as just kind of staying in one place. You're either progressing or you're regressing.

You're either walking or you're drifting. You're slipping. It's kind of like you're slipping. You go, how did I get here? Well, by an inactive faith.

By a cruise control kind of Christianity. Your work is unfinished. It means you've not, you've left it off. You started it, but not finished. Maybe you've become distracted.

[7 : 45] In our house, there's work that gets started, but doesn't get finished. Why is that? I'm not talking about her because she finishes her work.

There's work that gets started, but it doesn't get finished. Why is that? Distraction. Ooh, pretty butterfly.

You know, I don't know. Right? Why? So here's a church that started work, but didn't finish. They're, they're distracted. Or Jesus says they're dead.

What does dead mean? I found an interesting cross-reference in 1 Timothy 5, 6. It talks about dead and, and life.

Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5, 6, he says, She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

[8 : 42] Isn't that an interesting statement? She who is, or he, who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

The living dead. They're indulgent, self-indulgent. So if it's all about me, yeah, there's life there, but you're really, it's dead life. It's not real life.

If I'm self, if it's all about me, if it's just about self-indulgent, if it's about getting stuff for me, if it's about living like the world. See, the world has life and the world seeks things for security, for fulfillment, for enjoyment, for whatever reason.

But at the end of the day, what do we find when we pursue worldly things? Not real satisfaction.

There's temporary satisfaction, of course, otherwise we wouldn't even try it.

There's temporary fulfillment. There's temporary, you know, escape out of it or whatever. But it's not lasting. And then usually it kind of ends up with a kind of deadness. That's what he's saying.

[9 : 50] She or he who is self-indulgent is dead, even though they're living. It's not real life. This is what he says of this church.

But verse four, we learn that they're not all asleep. They're not all dying. There are some, there are a few, verse four. Yet you still have a few names in Sardis.

People who have not soiled or stained their garments. And they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Wow, they are worthy.

Wow. The stainless saints. They're unstained. These white lambs haven't taken the culture's stain to color them up.

Do you ever notice, the last truck I had was tan. I'm not excited about tan as a color. So I bought a new truck that's red.

[11 : 01] Because my dad always had red trucks. I'm going to get a red truck like my dad. First week I had this truck. Not brand new. It's 2012. But first week I had this, it rained and stormed.

And all along the side of this nice red truck is dirt. I never noticed that on my tan truck. That's why people get tan trucks.

If we're to be white, white is just a figurative, you know. Everything shows on white. If you have white wool and you just get rubbed up against it, boy, it shows, right?

Everything shows on white. So Sardis says, let's stain the wool. Then nothing will show up. Good way to cover it up, right?

Buy a tan truck. Never have to wash it. Looks good all the time. Well, it looks tan. Sorry. If you like tan, I'm sorry. I'm a color guy.

[12 : 14] I'm a color guy. I like color. When I was painting, it's like I put some red in there. Get some color in there. Wake it up. Anyway. But there's a price for that.

Okay. Here's these stainless saints. Their garments are not soiled. They're not stained. They're staying white.

Doesn't mean they're perfect by any means. They are worthy. Wow. That doesn't mean they've earned it. That doesn't mean, oh, see, they've matched up to the standard of God.

Doesn't mean that. It means, remember, often we're told in the New Testament, walk in a manner, what? Worthy of the gospel.

Doesn't mean be perfect. Walk in a manner worthy. Walk in a manner fitting, appropriate. In other words, you live differently. Because God has given you a spirit that has put new desires in you.

[13 : 19] You used to only have fleshly desires. Now you already, all of a sudden now, I got desires to please God. I have desires that I want to obey God. That doesn't irk me anymore.

There used to be a time when obeying God was a burden. I don't want to obey God, but I know I should. But then when your heart's changed, it's like, no, I want to.

And not always perfectly. Gotcha. Right? Okay. I got bad days. But at the end of the day, no, I want to please him. I want to do that. I really do.

So these are the worthy. The worthy, they're worthy because they're living a life that's appropriate to their name. They're praying.

They're walking. They're following Christ. They're not just cruising. They're not just doing what's natural. They live out who they are.

[14 : 22] Their faith is active. And as a result, they will suffer for Christ. All who desire to live godly in Christ will be what? Persecuted.

Oh, haven't you memorized that verse? Isn't that your favorite verse? All who desire to live godly in Christ will be persecuted. Yeah. Not excited to do it?

Okay. But it's true, isn't it? God tells us the truth up front. Doesn't tell us, hey, it's all going to be rosy. He says there's going to be some incredible, miraculous blessings.

But your real blessings coming after the suffering in this world. So there's a danger in a sleeping church.

If we're sleeping, if we're passive, if we're a dying church, there's a danger. Because it means there can come sudden ruin.

[15 : 30] Jesus says at the end of verse 3 to this church, If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief.

You will not know at what hour I will come. And then please notice the last two words of that verse. I will come. How?

Against you. Ouch. I will come against you. Okay. That probably doesn't mean good. It is Jesus, but it's still, what does that mean?

Well, he doesn't fill the sin. I don't know what it means. But he's coming. And he's not talking about the end come. He's talking about, I'm coming before the end. I'm going to come soon.

It'll be like a thief. You won't know. Thieves come. If we knew the thief was coming, we'd be ready, right? So I'll come like a thief. You're not ready. It'll be sudden. It'll be a surprise. And it's over.

[16:34] Okay. So there's danger. So 1 Thessalonians 5 talks about similar kind of issue here. He says, you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

He's talking about the last day in that case. He will come like a thief in the night where people are saying peace and security. Then sudden destruction will come upon them. Just like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman.

A pregnant woman. And they will not escape. But you. But you're not in darkness, brothers. For that day to surprise you like a thief.

For you are all children of light. Children of the day. We are not night or darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do.

But let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night. And those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober.

[17:34] Having put on the breastplate. See, readiness. Breastplate of faith and love. Helmet of hope. We know we're in a battle. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

There's a reason he died for us. So that we, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him.

Why does a church die? Why is this church dying? It's dying because it's not alert. It's not watching. It's passive on cruise control. They have a faith, but they're not active in their faith.

They believe in Jesus, but they're not trusting in Jesus each day. You know the difference? I have a belief.

Oh, I believe Jesus. Yeah, yeah, yeah, he's a good guy. And then there's, I'm talking to him and I'm trusting him. I'm leaning on him and I'm drawing from him and I'm crying out to him because I know I need him.

[18:49] Right? Not just to save me from my sin, but to save me from myself. So they're not, they're not alert.

They think they're okay. Maybe, maybe part of this, as Paul says, maybe they've forgotten why Jesus died. Kind of take for granted. Yeah, he's forgiven him of my sin.

Now I'm good. I got fire insurance and now I'm good. Well, that's not why he died for you. Yeah, to forgive your sins, but to change you. To give you a whole new identity.

You might experience life at a whole nother level. Not just settle for this earthly life. True faith is active, looking to Jesus, walking with the Spirit.

What does that mean, walking with the Spirit? It just means I know I'm depending. I'm looking to the Holy Spirit to give me the strength and the grace and the power to persevere, those kind of things.

[19:51] I know that I'm needy. If you're not living with the Spirit, you're dying without the Spirit. If you think you're okay, you're not okay.

Let him who thinks he's dead, take you. So how do you overcome this? How do you overcome this deadness? How do you overcome this? You know, when you're a Christian, my Christian life was alive, and now it's become this kind of cruise control, this kind of passive, this kind of just kind of spiritual deadness, kind of just blah.

Whatever you want to use, term you want to use to describe this. I'm just kind of living. How do I overcome that? How do I get to that real life? How do I get to walk with Jesus again?

I've lost that. How do I get that back? Well, that's what he's going to say here in verses 2 and 3. Basically, he's going to say, Your condition is urgent.

Redirect your way soon. It's kind of like the lighthouse talking to the ship. Coming in, the ship's coming in, and the commander's like, I'm a colonel, and I want you to move out of the way.

[21:02] You're in my path. The lighthouse says, Well, I'm a first lieutenant, and I'm a lighthouse, so you need to move. You know, it's kind of like that. How do I... You need to redirect your way

soon, because where you're headed is going to kill you.

So he gives five exhortations. Verse 2, he's going to say, Wake up. Strengthen. Verse 3, he's going to say, Remember, keep it, and repent. So he's got five urgent calls to them.

Three basic needs the church has. If you want to overcome spiritual deadness, passivity. Verse 2, vigilance. Verse 3, valuation.

In other words, think, remember, recall. And then verse 5, conquer, vanquish. To the one who conquers. To the one who overcomes. Okay, so vigilance.

First of all, verse 2, he says, Wake up. Literally, become watchful. It's the same word that Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane when his disciples kept falling asleep.

[22 : 06] Peter, James, and John keep falling asleep. Can you not stay with me one hour? Can you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.

So he's giving them a spiritual principle there. Watch. I know you're sleepy. I know you're tired. But this is a critical moment for me. Pray with me.

So be watchful, in other words. And then he says, strengthen. Strengthen what remains. There's still some life. There's still hope. It's not all over for you. You're not totally dead.

You are dying. But there is still something left. So fix it. Set it right. Finish what you started. Be intentional instead of passive.

Be deliberate. Pray. Read. Read. What is it that we need to do to be in the right place where God gives us grace? There are certain places God, we know, works.

[23 : 08] One, prayer. Okay? That's a place I can be. I can pray to him, talk to him, where he listens and he works. Okay, that's a place.

I need to be on that road. The other road I need to be in is be in or under the word. He speaks through the word. So let me be in the word. Because when the grace comes, it's most likely going to come when it's in, when I'm either in or under the teaching of the word.

When I'm with other Christians. So if I need to fix myself, if I need to get spiritually fixed, I need to be in those places where God says he pours out his grace.

He answers prayer. He speaks through the word. He works when Christians gather together. Those are not all the things, but those are the common avenues.

If I want to get grace, let me get on that street where he's working. Okay? Instead of, I'm just going to sit in the chair and wait for God to do something. Well, he might, but...

[24 : 16] Well, you ask him. He'll give you an answer. Do you have a plan? See, if you're dealing with passivity, if you're dealing with spiritual deadness, if you don't have a plan, and if you don't have a goal, you'll hit it every time, right?

Is that how they say it? You don't have a goal? No, no, no. Have a goal. Have a plan. Then, secondly, verse 3, he says, he next urges some valuation to think.

He says, remember something. Verse 3, remember then what you have received and heard. Let me correct one word there, because in the Greek, it's not what you received, it's how you received.

Remember then, not just what you received.

What did we receive and hear? We heard the gospel. We received and we heard the gospel. We received grace, right? His emphasis isn't on the content of what you heard, what you received.

It's on how you did it. See, we're talking about fixing the heart. We're talking about fixing this stuckness. And it's not just something I need to know in my head. It's something that needs to stir my heart.

[25 : 29] So don't just remember what you received, but how. So when I heard the gospel and it affected me and it changed my life, when I first heard the gospel and it convicted me, when I heard that God is a God who loves, who forgives, who is unchanging, but he's also a God, because he's God, who's holy and righteous and will not, right, let the guilty go unpunished.

So how can God be both, you know, just and loving? How will he ever forgive if he never forgets? Well, so I have who God is, then I have who I am.

When I look at who God is, I look at me and I go, ain't that. I'm not that loving. I'm not that just. I'm not that faithful. You know, I'm far short of all that.

In fact, when God says that the greatest command is to love him with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind and all my ode, I have to go, I love, but not like that.

So I failed. I broke. So how does God reconcile all this? Well, God so loves the world that he sent his only son to die in our place, to take God's wrath and to take our sin and to meet them there and

to give us holiness and righteousness.

[27 : 02] So we not just get forgiven, we get Jesus's righteousness given to us. So all of a sudden we're saints. We were sinners now.

Jesus takes the sin and gives us his holiness and we become saints. Not because we earned it, not because we, you know, achieved that. Because I got it as a gift.

It's a good, really good deal. I give him all my junk and he gives me his good. That's how God reconciles that. So because he punishes Jesus for our sin, who pays our debt.

Now I can be forgiven. So I remember that. I remember that. And when I heard those, when I heard that message, how did I hear it?

I heard it in brokenness. I heard it in neediness. I can hear that gospel message and not be moved at all. But sometimes when God speaks through the Holy Spirit and it pierces my heart, I hear that message and it breaks.

[28 : 10] Because I realize, yeah, God is that. Yeah, I am that. Oh, Jesus is that. Oh. You understand what he's saying?

If you want to recover, if you want to overcome passivity and spiritual deadness, get back to that place when you first heard the gospel and how did you hear it?

Get back to brokenness. Get back to humility. Get back to neediness. Our greatest danger is to think I don't need God's grace.

To think that I'm okay. And that's what Jesus is saying to this church. You're on the very edge of dying. Because you think you're okay.

Then he says, so not just remember, but keep it. So keep that mindset. Guard it. Pay attention lest you drift. And then he adds, as if we didn't get the message already.

[29 : 13] By the way, at the end of verse 3, he says, oh, repent. Repent. What is repent? Well, it's everything I just told you. It's, right? Wake up. It's strengthen what remains.

It's remembering. It's keeping. That's repent. Repent is just changing your direction. Change course, you know, to that ship heading for the lighthouse. Change course immediately.

Really? If not, Jesus says at the end of verse 3, if not, I will come. Like a thief.

And you won't know when. And I will come against you. So change course. Then verse 5, he gives some promises. He always gives promises.

Doesn't he? No, he, God doesn't try to just motivate us from, okay, you need to fix all this. He gives us really super reasons why. Because if you change, then I can bless you.

[30 : 12] And he gives three promises here. He says in verse 5, to the one who conquers, to the one who overcomes, to the one who is victor over this deadness. To the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white.

Just like the people, verse 4. Those who will walk with me in white. The one who conquers will also walk with me in white. White just representing the righteous acts. And two, I will never blot out his name out of the book of life.

And three, I will confess his name before my father and before his angels. Why will he confess his name before the father and his angels? Because remember, Jesus said, if you will not confess me before men on earth, I will not confess you before the father and heaven.

But if you confess me before people on earth, in other words, if you are brave enough to say and admit and tell people in public, I am a Christian, when appropriate, then I will confess you.

See, that's all he's saying. These people who will overcome get out of their deadness and they start talking again about this Jesus and this difference he makes in their life. He says, I will absolutely not blot you out of the book of life.

[31 : 34] So our text reads, I will never blot out his name out of the book of life. In the Greek, it's the double negative. It's a way of emphasizing guarantee certainty. I will absolutely not, never blot out your name.

In English, we use a double negative, it becomes a positive, right? In Greek, a double negative is no, no, no, no, no, no. Not never, not never, absolutely not. So in other words, it's an encouragement.

Your name's in there, it's staying. It'll never even come close to getting wiped out. So what is this book of life? He talks about the name in the book.

In fact, he mentions the word name four times in these six verses. In verse one, he talks about you have a reputation, a name of being alive. Verse four, he talks about the few names in Sardis who

are not stained.

And then in verse five, he talked two of the promises. I will never blot out his name. And then I will confess his name. So name, name's important here. What is it about having the name in the book of life?

[32 : 42] What is that? Well, let's do a really quick backtrack. First time the book shows up and mention of a book with names in it is Exodus 32.

Exodus 32, remember, is right after the people, Moses has gone up on the mountain, right? And all the people are down below. Gee, what do we do? Well, Moses is gone. Where'd he go? I don't know.

I think he's gone. We better make our own God. So they made their own God, right? Moses come down, breaks the tablets. We got to start over again. But first, God said, I'm going to wipe them out and start over with you, Moses.

What do you think about that? A little test for Moses. Moses says, no. In fact, if you don't forgive them for this, blot my name out of the book.

That's how much Moses loved these obstinate, stubborn people. Can you love obstinate, stubborn people? Well, when they're under your care, yeah, you do.

[33 : 41] Doesn't mean you like them. If you will not forgive their sin, please, if not, please blot me out of your book. That you have written. But the Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

And then he forgives them. So it's this phrase, the book of life occurs 11 times in the whole Bible. Six of those times is in the book of Revelation.

So it kind of comes to a head here. So we see it here in chapter three. Chapter 13 of Revelation, verse eight. All who dwell on the earth will worship the beast, the satanic empowered kingdom.

Everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the lamb who was slain. Okay. Okay. So the people whose name is not in the book of life or it's called the book of the lamb will worship that beast.

Revelation 17, eight. The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to rise from the bottom of his pit, go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth. That's interesting. Everybody who's not a Christian is called earth dweller.

[34 : 50] The people who dwell on the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast because it was and is not and is to come.

They'd get fascinated with this revived kingdom. Chapter 20 of Revelation 12. I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were open.

There's more than one book. I saw the dead greatest. I read that, didn't I? Then another book was open. So there's books and then there's the book, which is the book of life. And the dead are judged by what was written in the books, books of deeds.

And if anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. By the way, notice in all these references, it talks about a name that is not found in the book.

It does not say any name was ever erased from the book. Just a subtle difference. Finally, in chapter 21, he's talking about the people who belong to the heavenly city.

[35 : 52] Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. So what's the book of life?

It's the record of those names, specific names of people who are followers of the Lamb. How do you get in there? God writes your name. How do you know you're in there?

That's more important. How do you know if your name is in the book? Well, he just told this church, if you wake up, if you strengthen what remains, if you remember how you heard and received, if you keep that and repent, your name will never be erased.

That's how you know. Do I live the life of one who follows the Lamb of God? That's how I know my name is in there. I don't know because I have done enough.

I know because I see the fruit of God working in my life. Are you trusting in Jesus? Are you aware daily of your need of him?

[36 : 56] Are you awake to your own vulnerability to drift, your proneness to wander? See, being aware, that's really big.

Are you walking with the Holy Spirit or at least seeking to walk with him? That's how you know. May we hear what the Spirit is saying to us.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We recognize, oh, Father, I recognize that I so easily am vulnerable to being in this state.

I know me. I know, Lord, I can drift. I know I can become passive. I know that's a temptation.

To just kind of think I'm okay now. I can just kind of relax. And it's not that I can't find my rest in you, but sometimes in the Christian life, Lord, it's just a temptation to take a break.

[38 : 04] And then that break can become a vacation. And that vacation can become a way of life. So, Father, forgive us.

Help us to become watchful. Help us to strengthen what remains. To remember how we heard of your great grace.

To keep hold of that. And grant us, oh, Father, the power to repent. When our own natural spirit is resisting that with every fiber.

Overcome us, Lord, that we might overcome this. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.