

Seeking My King & His Kingdom
#24 Parallels Between Religious Jews & Sardis

I believe we can discover many parallels between the parable of the hidden treasure [Israel] and the church in Sardis which began with the reformation led by Martin Luther at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Key Point#1: Each had a name of notoriety, but Failed to Live Up to Their Name.

A. Jews were known to be God's chosen people - His Treasured Possession

B. Rev. 3:1b You are known for being alive. You have a name of notoriety.

A renowned name = "reformation" = came out of the Catholic Church to reform it

Jesus said: they were DEAD.

Key Point #2: Each group had been "hidden."

A. In the parable, Jesus found the treasure of Israel which had been hidden, scattered and dispersed among the nations of the world and the glory of God was obscured. The Jews had been under the rule of the Babylonians, Persians and were currently under the Roman Empire.

B. Sardis (Reformation Church) perfectly represents what happened to the Church between 1517 - 1790 AD. For the previous 1,000 years, the true Church was hidden and caught in the clutches of the apostate religious system headed by the Roman Catholic Church.

Key Point #3 Each was mired in a religious system condemned by Jesus Christ.

A. Many Jews were mired in the religious teachings of the Pharisees and scribes.

In Matt. 23, Jesus pronounces a scathing condemnation of them, and denounces false religion as utterly abhorrent to God and worthy of severe condemnation.

B. This apostate system, symbolized by the woman, Jezebel was condemned by Jesus in His letter to the church in Thyatira for tolerating the woman and her evil spirit.

These "Dark Ages," was a time of spiritual darkness and generalized apostasy.

1. The Bible was forbidden by the "laity" or the common people; only for the clergy.

2. Bibles were not available to the vast majority; available ones were in Latin.

3. Massive persecution of the Christians who opposed the Catholic Church resulted in about 1 million Christians being slaughtered under the guise of "Christianity."

Key Point #4: Each Are Offered A Way Out - A Way of Escape

A. Jesus came to the Jews under Roman rule and persecution and proclaimed:

"The Kingdom Of Heaven is at hand." He offered them a way out; escape of persecution.

He would establish His Kingdom and the Kingdom promises would be enacted.

B. Sardis pictures the Reformation Churches that came out of the Roman Churches of Pergamos and Thyatira - The Ones Escaping from the Roman Church. [those who Came Out]

The Reformation seemed to announce better days lay ahead for the true Church which had been hidden for almost 10 centuries.

1. Martin Luther's discovery of a fundamental doctrine of God's Word brought the resurgence and interest of the Bible and its message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. This truth: The Just Shall Live By Faith opened the door for their escape from the clutches of wickedness and apostasy.
3. People embraced the doctrine of "The Just Shall Live by Faith."
4. Wycliffe attacked the papacy and translated the Bible into English.
The Bible was translated into various languages and became available to all.
5. The invention of the Gutenberg printing press enhanced the spread of the reformation.

Key Point #5 Initially each group had crowds following.

A. Crowds followed Jesus so He could minister to their physical needs.

The Kingdom was the "buzz word." Miracle worker

B. Many joined Martin Luther and the reformation movement. Beginning in the 13th century, reformation of the Catholic Church was on everyone's lips, royalty, clergy and laymen alike, advisors to the papacy recommended it, several popes considered it but in the end the papacy was unwilling to give up temporal power. Three centuries of on and off talks without action discouraged reformers to the point of despair.

Key Point #6 Both the Jews & Sardis were bound to their Trappings & Rituals

A. The religious Jews were steeped in the Law and outward religion.

Jesus said in Matt. 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

1. The nation of Israel did not take the way of escape and were hidden under the chains of the law.

B. Sardis had a reputation they were alive, but Jesus said they were dead.

1. They took God's Word as mere doctrine rather than taking God's Word as life.

2. While the Reformation was successful in shaking off some of the more blatant heresies associated with the papacy, it retained much that obscured the supposed central teaching of sola scriptura and salvation by faith.

3. It is as if these central truths are buried beneath layers of pompous ecclesiology, dead orthodox theology and unscriptural eschatology.

George Eldon Ladd defined the Sardis church as "a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power."

II Tim. 3:5 Paul had described such Christians by saying they seemed quite religious but denied God's power in their lives. From such people, turn away.

Key Point # 7 Neither group fully embraced the way of escape to carry it to completion.

Neither group recognized the TRUTH before them. "Religion" got in their way.

A. The Jews rejected the way of escape by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah.

B. Rev. 3:2 I have not found your works perfect (complete;) before God.

1. The Reformationist came out of the Roman Church of Pergamum and Thyatira and brought much of the old with them.
 - a. Infant baptism and baptism by sprinkling were continued.
 - b. They kept much of the ritualism of the Roman Church and the Sacraments.
 - c. Theologians became more preoccupied with defining the Gospel.
 - d. Piety was transformed into a cold formalism, without any meaning or power.

Damaging Beliefs Of Reformation Church:

1. "Soft" hermeneutics > The Bible is not taken literally.
Scripture is allegorized which leads to a loss of meaning and power of God's Word.
 2. Denial Of Inerrancy Of Word Of God
 3. Denial Of Millennial Reign > Most of these churches do not believe in a literal 1,000-year reign by Jesus Christ on the earth at the end of the age. The angel promised Mary she would give birth to a son who would one day rule from David's throne.
This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled and will be during the millennium.
 4. Doctrine Of Imminency Of The Rapture Died
 5. Denial Of Israel's Prophetic Destiny > God made 4 unconditional covenants with Israel and Scripture confirms: God Is Not Finished With Israel. Most of these churches believe the Church has replaced Israel because she did not accept the Messiah. This misconception has given rise to very serious anti-Semitism in years past and is on the increase in the world today.
- Effect Today: Absence of Biblical devotion > De-emphasis of Gospel of Christ. The gospel message is watered down as words such as "sin" and "repentance" are offensive to the post-modern culture we live in. Messages delivered in churches are about "feel good", "seeker-friendly" and there is a loss of reverence and awe for our powerful and mighty God.
- f. Sardis was well known as an active, vigorous Christian congregation, characterized by good works and charitable activities. But in the sight of God, all of these religious activities were a failure because they were only formal and external, and not infused with the life-giving Holy Spirit.

Key Point #8: Both groups had enjoyed a great past.

A. Israel's past under King David & Solomon had been their "golden era."

The kingdom was strong, alive and known throughout the land. The kingdom split and both kingdoms ultimately turned to idols, spiritual adultery and were taken in captivity.

B. Sardis, once strong, once virile, once alive, once a powerful church began to sow sin.

The first separation from Catholicism came when both the Luther Church and the Church of England severed their relationship with Rome. However, both denominations kept the liturgy of the Catholic Church with few doctrinal changes. This spawned further separation of Reformers who gave up on reforming these two Protestant denominations. In time as doctrinal issues were hotly debated further separations occurred until 1,000 Protestant denominations dotted Europe with little communication between them just as Christ had prophesied. Eventually fervor of scriptural truths also died off just as Christ had prophesied.

1. Different interpretations of the Bible resulted in the rise of numerous denominations
2. The church became fragmented and divided into countless "churches."
3. They became weak, blind, dead and were bound in brass chains grinding the grain of sin's prison, not even knowing that God had long since departed.

Key Point #9 Both groups were offered restoration, but the restoration was incomplete.

A. The Jews were offered the Kingdom, but rejected it.

B. Protestantism soon politicized itself and became a national religion (state churches), thus making the same errors as the Church it had left.

1. Martin Luther worked with and sought out the approval of the political leaders.

The Lutheran Church became the State Church of Germany. Entire countries became Protestant (Anglican Church of England) without being Born-Again. This mirrors Constantine when he made Christianity the official religion of Rome and strongly encouraged all citizens to convert.

Key Point #10 Both groups had outward "religion" with no inward change.

A. The religious Jews were very concerned with keeping all the rules and rituals, but they were full of hypocrisy.

The Jews were to be a light to all other nations to display the glory of God.

B. During the Sardis church period there were nine million European Protestants that separated from the Catholic Church; that's 1/6 of the total population in Europe which at that time numbered 54 million people. How could it be that nine million Protestants had little spiritual impact on Europe if they were faithful overcomers who spread the gospel? They became entrenched in rituals and a dead faith. Jesus said their works were like a dead corpse.

Truth: Religious activity that does not encourage and stimulate personal, relational growth with our Lord is a waste of time! Empty religion is like digging your own grave.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, but the Lord is not deceived."

Denis Lyle: "Tragically, many churches are dead. Like the rotting carcass of Lazarus, these church bodies have the foul stench of death upon them. They have the appearance of life, but they are in actuality, dead. Their sanctuary is A Morgue with a Steeple.

They are congregations of corpses. They have undertakers for ushers; embalmers for elders; and morticians for ministers. Their pastor graduated from the Cemetery.

The choir master is the local coroner. They sing, "Embalmed in Gilead."

At the Rapture, they will be the first churches taken for "the dead in Christ shall rise first."

Traits of Sardis & Reformation Churches

1. Like a carnal believer who starts out well, but...fails to move on, grow up and learn to experience their position in Jesus Christ. They are active, engaged in "works," but temporally dead and out of fellowship with Christ. They fail to persevere.

2. Fail to build on the foundational truth.

a. Just like the remnant from Babylon who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple

b. Opposition Rose Up

Sixteen years passed and the temple lay half-completed, the foundation overrun with weeds and grass. They stood as a mute reminder of the Jews' failure to take care of God's house.

b. Haggai gave a stern message to them because after building the foundation, they abandoned it and pursued their own homes and lives.

Consider Your Ways:

1. The Temple is in ruins.

2. You are neglecting the worship of God.

3. Your priorities are misplaced. You have drifted from the truth that God is first.

4. Your ways are an embarrassment to God and a blemish on His reputation.

The "reformation" we need is to allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work that was started in us. Allow Him to mature us and "grow us up into the fullness of Jesus Christ."

Possible Causes Of Spiritual Immaturity:

I. Starvation

I Peter 2:2 as newborn babes, desire [crave = long for, yearn] the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby,

II. Spiritual Deafness

A. Itching Ears Hearing

II Tim. 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Problem: Easy prey of every false teacher because they lack a foundation in God's Word.

Eph. 4:14 ...by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive...

Spiritual ignorance makes them easy prey for the wiles, deceit, trickery and craft of any "ministers" of unrighteousness who appear as "angels of light." [II Cor. 11:14-15]

Remember: This church had claimed: The just shall live by faith, but they failed to go on in the truths of sanctification. They put themselves under rituals, traditions, disciplines, etc. to "mature themselves."

Leonard Ravenhill: "The Bible says men have itching ears, but I have NO commission from God to scratch them."

Adrian Rogers: "It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals than to speak falsehood that comforts and then kills."

B. Dull Of Hearing

Heb. 5:11-14 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [sluggish, lazy] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

1. Dull = slothful; condition of spiritual apathy; laziness that prevents spiritual growth

2. Dull = unable to listen to the Word, receive it and act on it

Remaining on milk stops growth and one will forever remain "unskilled in the word of righteousness." By remaining immature, one will not be able to "distinguish good from evil" or sound Biblical doctrine from apostate or evil teachings of the many false teachers. The way to spot apostasy is to "leave the elementary doctrine of Christ" and to "go on to maturity."

The Perils of Immaturity: Dead Works Precede Apostasy

Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, states 5 admonitions to "heed God's Word" and the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not.

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| 1. Heb. 2:1-4 | Drifting From The Word > | Neglect |
| 2. Heb. 3:7-4:13 | Doubting The Word > | Doubting |
| 3. Heb. 5:11-6:20 | Dullness Toward The Word > | Sluggishness |
| 4. Heb. 10:26-39 | Despising The Word > | Willfulness |
| 5. Heb. 12:14-29 | Defying The Word > | Refusing To Hear |

A.W. Tozer: The average Christian is NOT Christ-like and lives a sub-Christian life.

Average Christians are NOT willing to obey the call to spiritual growth and maturity. God will not compromise with anyone over the issue of disobedience to truth He has revealed to them. Any who knowingly refuses to obey will be brought to a distinct halt in their spiritual life. People are sitting all around in the church, just as though the axle has broken, and not making any progress for years. They are stopped by their disobedience.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore Let Us Go On and get past the elementary stage in the teachings *and* doctrine of Christ, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity.

Let us not again be laying the foundation of repentance *and* abandonment of dead works (dead formalism) and of the faith [by which you turned] to God,

A.W. Tozer: Do not grow comfortable with your present spiritual state. There is always more ground to gain. Submit to the Holy Spirit whose transforming power will complete the work in you.

Two historic terms characterize this period of church history: Reformation and Protestantism. The Reformation was an attempt by righteous and faithful Christians to reform the Catholic Church. Protestantism on the other hand incorporated more than just Christians. It involved heads of state, secret societies and Christians who together politically and militarily protested against the temporal power of the Catholic Church. Walter Scott in "Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ" explained it this way: "We distinguish between Reformation and Protestantism; the former was a divine work, the latter a human system."

History records that the Reformers did not complete the reformation of the Catholic Church and Christ was not pleased for three reasons:

1. The once spiritually motivated reformers turned into politically motivated protestors. They joined forces with secret societies and monarchies to fight the common enemy.
2. When they picked up their arms to fight the Catholic Church, their spiritual works died. This not only created a separation from Catholicism, it abruptly halted any future reformation of it.
3. Protestantism soon politicized itself and became a national religion (state churches), thus making the same errors as the Church it had left. As a result, many Protestant Reformers apostatized. When their spiritual works died, the denominational churches became a spiritual graveyard.