

# The Seven Churches of Revelation

## Part 2

Speaker	J.S. Blackburn
Duration	00:55:15
Online version	<a href="https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jsb017/the-seven-churches-of-revelation">https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jsb017/the-seven-churches-of-revelation</a>

*Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.*

[00:00:01] The Revelation, chapter 3.

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.

I know thy works, that thou hast to name, that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

If thou 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.

[00:01:03] 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 us recall that what we have before us in these letters is nothing less than the appraisal of the Lord Jesus Christ of the situation amongst the churches.

Not viewed, the church not viewed in its single beauty and perfection as the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, nor viewed as the house of God, but using a figure which [00:02:09] as far as I can see occurs nowhere else, regarding the individual churches as lamps.

This is the criterion by which the Lord Jesus Christ is judging the churches.

Let us recall also that we have here something that is so very well known to most of us, and that is it is the risen and ascended Christ who is speaking to us. We have his view, and in this church at

Laodicea we have something very clearly, very nearly approaching the state of affairs in which we live. It's the appraisal by the risen Lord of what he sees in the churches.

Now let us never forget, because we can easily forget, the criterion is the lamp.

[00:03:07] To what extent are the churches fulfilling their privilege and that for which they've been equipped by the gift of the Spirit, to what extent are the churches fulfilling their function as lamps?

And I don't think any of us would doubt that according to the well-known passage that was quoted yesterday evening by the Lord Jesus Christ says, men do not light a lamp to hide it away.

They light a lamp to put it into a lamp stand that it may give light to everyone around.

These were the words of the Lord Jesus himself, and these are the kind of concepts that we have to have in view when we consider the Lord is judging, he's appraising the churches.

He presents himself in the first chapter in a most unusual character, is the character [00:04:08] of a judge with eyes like a flame of fire and a two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth, the word of God used in judgment.

And we have therefore in these chapters the exact fulfillment of the word of Peter, that judgment must begin at the house of God, and then after that where will the ungodly and the unrighteous appear?

Although therefore these considerations make our reading of such passages of tremendous importance, yet at the same time how unspeakably beautiful, how unspeakably tenderly appealing to our hearts is the kind of comfort that we have in these passages. Beginning with the comfort given to John, when he fell at his feet as one dead, and [00:05:01] that comforting, strengthening right hand was placed upon him, and he was given the assurance, fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead, and in those words is the victory over every contrary force acting upon the church, because our hope and our strength is in himself that can never fail and his spirit. But all these promises that we have, the fact that the overcomer will eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God, and one by one we go through the comfort that there is for us in these words. So there is an appraisal with the need therefore for repentance and the willingness to see ourselves through the eyes of the Lord in the greatest possible mercy given us here. What Christ thinks of the church now, we're in no doubt about because we have it here. And therefore there is the conscience work that is required when we are confronted by [00:06:05] such appraisal by the Lord Jesus Christ. But oh how wonderful that there is also the comfort and the strength available to him in him, and that is depicted in the opening to every one of the letters.

Now I suppose it will be wise for me to say at the beginning that Sardis is Protestantism.

Some of us who have responsibility for the work in Zaire not long ago received a sheaf of papers from the president of what calls itself the Church of Christ in Zaire proclaiming that in the year 1979 there would be the celebration services with great rejoicing, and I suppose banners flying and drums playing, there was going to be the celebration of 100 years of [00:07:01] Protestantism, the very word that we are using, 100 years of Protestantism in Zaire. Well of course there's been a great deal more than 100 years of Protestantism in this country, and it's a very good thing for us to know what the Lord Jesus thinks about Protestantism. Now one of the things that puzzled me for many years as I

read this passage and heard the kind of things that are said about it is if this is what comes after the Reformation, how has it come about that we have so little that can discernibly be applied to the Reformation and the Reformers?

And I've discovered of course that there is an extremely plain and straightforward answer to that, and I hinted at it last night, and that is that these letters do not tell us the events providentially brought about by the interposition of God on the stage of history. These letters do not say anything at all about the events that brought about these states [00:08:05] of affairs.

We read nothing about the accession of emperors from Nero forward, disposed to persecute the church, and continuing until the beginning of the fourth century, nothing at all about these emperors. They would think that they were the people who mattered. There's nothing at all about this, but there is only the condition of a lamp in the church of Smyrna consequent upon the fact that they were in a period of persecution. What a tremendous event historians make of the fact that there was a Christian emperor who acceded to the throne and put an end to the suffering and brought in toleration. Not a word about that, but what there is is the judgment of the Lord upon the results of it, the consequences of it, the unholy marriage between the church and the world, [00:09:01] and so it is here. There's nothing at all about the great event by which God providentially brought about the recovery of so much precious truth that had been lost throughout all the dark ages, but after this had done its work and after the reaction to it and the response to it had become manifest in the system established by the Reformation, that is Protestantism, the Lord gives his verdict upon it.

So this is not the Reformation. This is not the Reformers. We owe a tremendous debt to the Reformers. We owe a tremendous debt to those men who hazarded their lives and very often gave their lives that we might have the Word of God in our hands, who so toiled that the Word of God was set free with such tremendous results. But what happened afterwards? What happened when these privileges were available in the churches? Well, this is what this letter tells us. [00:10:02] They soon came to the situation when, because of all this, they had a name to live and they were dead.

Now, as we approach this letter in detail, I want to say another word or two about the fact that there is a recognizable pattern in the structure of each one of these letters.

They all begin with a certain presentation of himself that the Lord Jesus Christ gives for that church.

We are left to understand and to believe that if these churches had taken account of that character that was made available to them in their Lord and Savior, that they would have not fallen into the traps that they did. And we are left to understand also that if there are individuals who are willing to take [00:11:01] hold by faith and response to what the Lord Jesus Christ presents himself, the way the Lord Jesus Christ presents himself in these letters, then it's by this that they can be overcomers.

So the first thing that is in every letter is the Lord Jesus presents a particular facet or a particular set of facets of himself and all that's available in him for the church as a lampstand.

And they all end with exactly the same little paragraph which deals with the overcomer, the individual response, the individuals who do not succumb to the seductions, the blandishments, or the terrors of the world, no, they don't succumb, they overcome. And the last few words are in every case addressing most precious promises to the overcomer, together [00:12:03] with a call that he who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Now in between we have a rather

varied collection of little paragraphs in which we have appraisal by the Lord Jesus Christ of what he sees in the churches, of revelation of the failures of those churches, of counsel as to what he wants them to do if they will listen to his voice, and in some cases a special word of commendation to some who actually did conduct themselves in a manner pleasing to him. It's varied except for the first, that is the presentation of Christ himself, and the last, that is to the overcomer. But if we cast our eyes down this particular letter, the letter to the church at Sardis, [00:13:03] then we see that the presentation of the Lord Jesus of himself occupies the first part of the first verse only.

He that speaks is the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

The appraisal of what the Lord Jesus Christ sees in this church is also only a half of the verse.

It's the rest of verse one, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.

And then in verses two and three we have the Lord's counsel. He wants to bring them the things that they should do in response to what he has to say, but in with this counsel there are a few extra words of appraisal that are very important that we should understand them. In verse four we have rather a special feature, and that is the actual pointing out that there [00:14:04] are few individuals.

So special is this that their very names are indicated. Thou hast a few, even in Sardis, 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, in verse five, the promise to the overcomer and the call that the opened ear will hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. It's always pointed out that what the Spirit saith to the appeal to him that will hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, in the first three churches comes before the overcomer.

But in the last three churches, the last four churches rather, we find that the call to hear comes after the overcomer, as much as to give a hint that it's likely in these cases [00:15:05] so far has been the declension that it's only those who are overcomers whose ears really will be open to what the Spirit saith to the churches. How much we would desire to take account of ourselves by our very presence here this evening on these chapters of being read. How much we'd like to take account of ourselves as those who have ears and desire to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. These are the words of the Lord Jesus from heaven, the one who was dead for our sakes and is alive again at the right hand of the throne of God. They're made available to us by the Spirit. We want to be amongst those who hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. Let us think, first of all, of the introduction in the first part of verse three.

[00:16:02] These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God. Now that might be a confusing difficulty to us.

We know that it's a very important part of our creed, so clearly understood in Scripture that there is one Spirit of God.

The unity of the Spirit in what he does is emphasized in so many places. There is one Spirit of God. How then does it come about that in the first chapter, when it speaks about the Spirit, it says in the fourth verse of the first chapter, grace be unto you and peace from him which is and which was and which is to come, that's God of course, and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

And when we come also over to chapter four, we read about the seven Spirits that are before [00:17:03] his throne.

Now the one who speaks here is the one who has the seven Spirits of God, and understanding it cannot possibly mean that there is more than one Spirit of God, then this manner of speech seems to indicate the absolute plenitude and fullness of the power and everything that's needed from the Lord Jesus Christ, it is available to us through the Holy Ghost. The Lord Jesus Christ possesses the seven Spirits of God. Now most of you will be aware of the passage in Isaiah chapter 11, which comes as near as could be to explaining this to us, at least so it seems to me.

In Isaiah chapter 11, we are immediately following the last destruction, the destruction [00:18:01] of the last great enemy of God's people Israel, that is the Assyrian.

It almost reads to me like a series of newspaper headings telling about the progress of that last great assault upon Jerusalem by the Assyrian, and he's cut down, verse 34, he's cut down, and then we read that the earthly reign of the Lord Jesus Christ begins.

Verse chapter 11, there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Very rightly, the translators have put a capital B there, a branch shall grow out of its roots because it is no other than the first of the Messianic King, our Lord and Savior. In verse 2, now notice that we have a sevenfold statement in verse 2 of the activities of [00:19:01] the Spirit of God in the perfect government that's going to come upon the earth. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. I'm sure you'll have seen that there's first of all a single statement, the Spirit of the Lord, and then after that there are three pairs of statements dealing with wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Now that seems to me to be a passage which gives us an explanation of what the Spirit of God means by speaking about the seven Spirits of God. It talks about the plenitude, the fullness, the complete adequacy of the spiritual power that's in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, how different would have been the history of the Protestantism if there had been a full [00:20:08] understanding that the complete power to meet the needs of his churches were in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no need to find light, there was no need to find wisdom and understanding anywhere else than that which begins in the fear of the Lord. There was adequate provision through the Spirit of God from whom we receive the Word of God and the power to understand it and to fulfill it, a special attention drawn to the fact that in the Spirit, in the plenitude of his power and adequacy that's portrayed in this expression, there was that which would have delivered Protestantism from its worst excesses.

And by the same token, how wonderful if we see that this is true and we find that it [00:21:01] is true in the Word of God, in our experience, then it is this will make us overcomers. Now it also says only two things said about the Lord Jesus here.

And the second one is that he has, possesses not only the seven Spirits of God, but he possesses the seven stars.

Now because of the wide range of the matters which came before us yesterday, I don't think a single word was said about the stars.

And a great deal of ink and paper has been expended upon speculations as to who the stars could be.

Well it seems to me that there are some plain indications as to what is meant by this.

First of all, the word angels means messenger.

Its general use, almost universally in scripture, is to a level of spiritual beings higher than [00:22:05] man on the scale of creation, the angels, those beings who veil their faces in the presence of the Lord, those angels who are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that would be heirs of salvation. But it's obvious that this is not the meaning here. These were people who were there and they were with the Apostle John. And it seems very plain to me that therefore the fundamental idea in saying that they're angels is back to the original meaning of the word messengers. They were the messengers who come from these seven churches to John in his exile in the island of Patmos.

And John was commanded to give these letters to the seven messengers of the churches and send them back.

Now the second stage in our understanding of what they were is that it was by these men therefore the light coming from the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven was conveyed to the [00:23:05] churches.

They were the ones who, so to speak, stood to those churches in the part of Christ himself. They were the channels by which the light and the power and the blessing that should flow from the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven would flow to them. And that gives another indication what is meant by this.

And therefore, it seems to me that we should think of these as being in totality, viewing as one whole, the means whereby the will of the Lord Jesus Christ is communicated to the churches.

Therefore it's an expression which gives the totality of the work of the gifts and perhaps also of the offices in the church.

It represents order and authority and the means whereby the Lord Jesus speaks to his [00:24:03] own. Now if in the Reformation churches they had understood that the Lord Jesus Christ had it in his power to make full provision for order and rule and light and ministry in that church which was his own possession in order to further their work as lamps, they wouldn't have gone so far astray as they have done in the appalling mass of complete disobedience to himself relative to order and gift and ministry in the church. It's a striking thing that in the first letter, the seven stars are in his hand. In this letter, there's something less implied by saying that he has the seven stars. He could have given them all that was needed for a communication from himself perhaps by order and ministry in the church. [00:25:02] He's the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. And the more I reflect upon these two brief characteristics of the one who speaks, the more it seems to me that it's a complete answer to where the churches that came from the Reformation went astray.

They didn't realize the plenitude and adequacy of the power of the Spirit of God that was in the hands of the Lord, and they didn't understand that the Lord was himself making adequate provision. You

see, up to the Reformation, order and ministry in the church, such as it was, was by apostolic succession, nothing else, apostolic succession.

Well, when this was broken down at the Reformation, what an opportunity there was to go back to the fountainhead in Scripture. Instead of that, we see a most appalling array of the ideas of man about order and rule as [00:26:04] well as ministry in the church, instead of recognizing the fact that the Lord Jesus had the seven stars and could have controlled this matter completely.

Now, I would like to take together the two parts of the appraisal.

The first is in the end of verse one.

I know that thou hast an end that thou livest and art dead.

Incidentally, I believe that the always repeated introduction to this part, which says, I know thy works, really means that nothing that you are doing is hidden from me. My eyes, like a flame of fire, and my mouth, like a sharp, two-edged sword, there's nothing at all hidden from me. I know what you're doing.

[00:27:01] The works simply mean what you're doing. I know whether it's good, whether it's bad, whether it's something, whether it's nothing. I know what you're doing.

Nothing at all is hidden from me. If I were to go back to that passage in Isaiah chapter 11, the next part of it tells us that when he comes, he will not judge after the hearing of his ear. He'll judge with righteousness. Now, all human judgment, at its best, comes down to listening to what somebody heard or what somebody saw, and justice can never be better than the evidence provided by what somebody heard or what somebody saw. But when the Lord Jesus comes to reign, he will not judge by the hearing of the ears or the seeing of eyes. He'll judge with justice and with judgment, and so it is for the churches. The Lord Jesus Christ knows what we are doing.

It's a serious voice to our consciences.

[00:28:02] The Lord Jesus Christ knows our consciences, and our only right attitude is to be before him judging ourselves in those things that his presence reveals are displeasing to himself. And unjudged actions and thoughts of ours, which we know to be displeasing to himself, how must they not be a large cause of the weakness that there is?

The Lord Jesus Christ says, I know what you are doing. And then, consequent upon this, he says, Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Now, we can easily see how it was said of Protestantism that it had a name to live.

When you think of the tremendous things that came out at the Reformation, and I'll speak of them exactly in a moment or two, then it's not surprising that the Lord Jesus says here, [00:29:02] you've got a name to live. Why? Because you've got the word of God. You've got an open Bible.

You've rejected all other kind of authority, and you seek to obey my authority by the word. They had indeed a name to live. But as time passed, and as this verdict became more and more manifest that the Lord Jesus Christ says of the mass in Protestantism, there are a few exceptions in the end, but of

the mass, although you have a name to live, you are dead. And it is not true.

But there's a tremendous amount of absolute death, lifeless profession in the great mass of the Protestant churches. It isn't up to us to judge this, but the Lord Jesus says, Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.

Now the second part of the appraisal is in verse two, I have not found thy works perfect before God.

[00:30:03] Now then, the great deal that might be said about this, I have not found thy works perfect before God.

If we survey the geography of these seven churches, you would, if you looked at the map, you would see that in your mind you take a journey from south to north, up the coast of Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea, and after the third one, you go a little bit inland and then come back in a parallel course on your tracks. You see Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos, pretty well on the coast.

And then very close to them, you have Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, they're very close together.

And the fact that this series begins with Ephesus and ends with Laodicea, we mustn't [00:31:01] think of Laodicea before we came to these letters as the absolute end of unfaithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ that's going to be spewed out of his mouth. The church at Laodicea is mentioned alongside the church at Colossae in the last verses of Colossae.

And it seems to me very plain that in this particular selection of the seven churches, we are thinking of the churches at the very height of the revelation of what God had given. The very truths concerning Christ and the church that were needed to complete the Word of God, they were available in this area and in these churches. And the first and the last, that is Ephesus and Laodicea, read in terms of the epistles only a few years afterwards, seems to me to indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ is judging of these churches not only in view of the fact that there were intended by him to be [00:32:02] lamps and witnesses during the whole of his absence to all the truth made available to them by the Word and the Spirit, but also he is judging them in view of the fact that in this particular area, the last stone was laid upon the marvelous edifice of divine revelation when the Apostle Paul brought out, as moved by the Spirit of God, the truth of the mystery. Oh, that which is so, so very great a thing in the heart of the blessed Lord himself, the truth of Christ and the church. I spoke about this just a little yesterday, but I hope that it comes across to you that the Lord Jesus, we must take, I feel, convinced as judging of these matters in the light of the fact that they were intended to be witnesses in the widest sense of what they knew from himself and that they were being judged in terms, they were being appraised in terms [00:33:05] of the fact that the very highest truth, the very last stone in the edifice of revelation had been known, had been made known to these very churches. Thy works, I have not found thy works complete before God.

In Colossians chapter 1, verse 25, so familiar that it's hardly necessary for me to turn to it, Colossians chapter 1, verse 25, the Apostle Paul, having first of all spoken about himself as minister of the gospel, then goes on to speak himself as minister of the church or the mystery. And he said, in this sense, it was given to me to complete the word of God.

The mystery it was that was required to bring out the last of the great truths that remained



unrevealed.

[00:34:01] You see, it doesn't mean that the last book was written because the revelation goes over many truths and uses many figures and expressions that are already well-known. It's the close of a story that had long been told in the Holy Scripture. We only needed to know the end of it, but when the Apostle Paul wrote the epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, it was given to him to complete the word of God. Now when the Lord Jesus Christ says of the church at Sardis, of Protestantism, I have not found thy works perfect before God, I'm sure, I'm as sure as possible that that has a quite specific meaning.

Now let us go back to what the works, what the work of the Reformation was.

Well one could put it in three ways, and they're absolutely tremendous, all of them. The first of all, and even the secular historian admits this, the first thing they did was [00:35:05] to liberate the word of God.

Up to that time, it had been hidden away in handwritten manuscripts, in monasteries and in other places, and in languages that were hardly known to anyone. Latin, of course, was known, but it wasn't one of the original languages of Scripture. But it was given to the Reformers to set free the word of God.

Connected with their works was the great work of Bible translation in all our European languages, and by printing instead of hand-copying of manuscripts, the word of God was set free to do its own work in bringing light and life wherever the beams of its light were shining.

So the first great thing was that they set free the word of God. And you and I are able to sit here tonight with open Bibles in our hands because of that [00:36:02] great work of the Reformation.

How could it possibly have gone wrong with such a beginning? It did go wrong because the result here is that there was an aim to live and they were dead. The second great work of the Reformation was that they repudiated—and this is what gave them so much difficulty—they repudiated the authority of the Church and the Pope in all matters relating to Christian faith and behavior, and they substituted the very Bible that they had set free.

And what a tremendous thing that was. With all the might of the Church and the Empire, the Pope and the Emperor against them, these few lowly men, and the hand of God, they did this wonderful work.

They repudiated, and millions have accepted the result of that repudiation. [00:37:05] Our authority is God himself, and it is made known to us not by the Pope and the councils, but it's made known to us in Holy Scripture. The absolute authority for the Christian in all matters relating to his faith and conduct is the word of God. It's everyday stuff to you and me, but it was absolutely a revolutionary beginning in the hands of the Reformers, raised up by God to do it. And the third great thing they did was to uncover the true way of salvation, not by paying money into the Pope's coffers, not by doing the works of the Church, not by pilgrimages and penances, but salvation due to the one sacrifice of Calvary, bringing justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Now these were tremendous works, and we have every reason to thank God for them, and we [00:38:06] have no reason at all to take these letters as being an indication that these weren't three tremendous works.

In the work that was then begun, we read here that it was incomplete. It wasn't carried to a proper conclusion. Now in what respect was the work therefore not carried to a conclusion? There was absolutely no attempt to follow the Reformation principle of obedience to the word of God into the matter of order and government in the Church.

And there was absolutely no recovery of the truth of Christ and the Church.

The Reformers and all, very many of those who follow them today, do not discern the true unique wonder of the Church in the sense of the place it occupies in the counsels of [00:39:07] God and the love of Christ.

Those who follow the Reformers' tradition in the Reformed Churches believe that the Church has been the same body from Abel and it will be to the end, and that Moses and David were just as much pillars in the Church as the apostles. They failed entirely to uncover the New Testament truth concerning the Church, and so it says there, therefore, that he had not found the works perfect before God.

And it leaves the matter wide open, you see, for some completion of the work of the Reformation in applying its principles to those great things that the word of God speaks of in the Church, in its worship, and in the true nature of the Church, and above all and especially [00:40:03] what it is to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved it and gave himself for it.

Now, this is what is written over Protestantism as a whole, and the more you find out about it, the more you'll find out that's exactly what the state of affairs is, a name to live and dead in its widest way.

But I want to go immediately to verse 4, Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Now that's a very lovely verse indeed. The Lord Jesus Christ looking down upon this strange mixture, he has to come up with unsparing condemnation and no church except Laodicea is so scathingly treated, if we may with reverence use such a word, as Sardis is. The Lord Jesus Christ plainly tells us what the truth is about Protestantism, but it does [00:41:05] say Thou hast even in Sardis a few names of those who have not defiled their garments and they are worthy. We've got to think of that in view of the lamp, you see. Those few names must have been people who had a special impact upon the church's responsibility as lamps and there were a few names who had not defiled their garments.

Now I didn't expect to be quite so long in reaching it as I have been, but I want to occupy about five minutes or so of the time which I hope you will permit me to read a few extracts and I want to tell you exactly why I think these extracts are so important.

In the first place, they illustrate exactly what it means to say that these few names [00:42:07] had not defiled their garments. Next, it shows how though they had such tremendous zeal and their hearts were moved by such love to Christ, yet they were all the time stultified and opposed and their service was made difficult by the ecclesiastical systems in which they had to work.

And at the same time, we find that they in the most, perhaps the most perfect and full way that we've ever seen, they did carry out the wonders of the great works of the Reformation and that is the word of God and the proclamation of the gospel. And I maintain that you and I have a great deal to learn in

one of our principal failures today from these few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments. [00:43:05] You could tell me the names as well as I can tell you. Richard Baxter and John Bunyan, John Wesley and George Whitefield, and Cowper and John Newton, all names in Sardis of men through whom the light of the word of God and the gospel shone when with unexampled devotion they fulfilled so far as their lights were concerned the function of being a lamp. Now the things I've said are illustrated in a story of a person much less known than the ones I've quoted, but nevertheless, step by step illustrates the point. It was William Grimshaw and he enjoyed the title of perpetual curate of the parish of [00:44:01] Howarth in the Yorkshire Moors.

I suppose it would be the same place with which the Brontes were collected.

Before that, he was at a place called Todman. We begin the story in 1731, and I'm only reading a few minutes' extracts. The 11 years during which Grimshaw resided at Todman were beyond doubt the turning point in his spiritual history.

About the year 1734, Grimshaw began for the first time to feel deep concern about his own soul and the souls of his parishioners. He was already a clergyman of many years' standing. A change came over his life and behavior. He laid aside the diversions in which he had hitherto spent the greater part of his time, such as hunting, fishing, card playing, reveling, and merrymaking, you see, unnamed to live [00:45:02] and was dead, and his garments defiled on every hand.

Hunting, fishing, card playing, reveling, and merrymaking, and he began to visit the people and press upon them the importance of the truth of Christianity.

At the same time, he commenced the practice of praying in secret four times a day, a practice which there is reason to believe he never left off. There is nothing to show that his views of Christianity at this period were any but the most dark and obscure of the distinctive doctrines of the gospel, salvation by grace, justification by faith, free pardon through Christ's blood, and the converting power of the Holy Ghost, he probably knew nothing at all.

But after the struggle between light and darkness had been going on for years, the final result was that after these several years of severe conflict, Grimshaw no longer walked in darkness [00:46:04] but had the full light of life. The scales fell from his eyes. He saw and knew the whole truth, and the truth made him free.

Then he came to his work in Haworth.

His principal testimony is to the power of the scriptures at this crisis in his spiritual history.

It is very striking and instructive. Like many others, he found the Bible almost a new book in his hand. In the middle of his spiritual conflict, and before he had found peace, it is related that a poor woman came to him in great distress of soul and asked him what she must do. He could only say, I cannot tell what to say to you, Susan, for I am in the same state myself, but the despair of the mercy of God would be worse than all. You see, he was very much a member of that which had a name to live and was dead in an [00:47:02] absolutely nothing to give until such time as he was converted.

Grimshaw began his work at Haworth after a manner very different from his beginning at Todberdon.

He commenced preaching to his wild and rough parishioners the gospel of Christ in the plainest and most familiar manner, and followed up his preaching by house-to-house visitation. Wherever he could find, wherever he could get people together in a room, a barn, a field, a quarry, or by the roadside, he was ready to preach. His visiting was not a mere going from family to family to gossip about temporal matters such as sickness and the children, life touched that, such as sickness and the children. Wherever he went, he took his master with him and spoke to people plainly about their souls.

This was the kind of work in which he spent his whole life at Haworth, preaching publicly [00:48:04] and privately repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ for the whole of his 21 years of ministry.

And then the fact that he was in Sardis becomes manifest in the fact that he got complicated with the toils of the interposition of the ecclesiastical authorities because he didn't keep to his parish.

It says he was a man of rare diligence and self-denial. None ever worked harder than he did in his calling, and few worked so hard. He seldom preached less than 20 and often nearly 30 times in a week. In doing this, he would constantly travel scores of miles, content with the humblest fare and the roughest accommodation.

And then I'll proceed to read you about the ecclesiastical authorities coming to him. You see, I hope this comes to you as it has done to me over the last few years. [00:49:06] Out of Sardis, out of the Lord's commendation for a few names who had not defiled their garments, there comes to us the most terrific challenge of what it means to be a servant of Christ in the gospel.

There was no big organization, but there was toil and prayer and exercise and searching the people day and night, week in and week out, for these long periods. Well, the story of the interposition of the ecclesiastical authorities serves also the purpose of showing what the results were.

A thing that is really wonderful—incidentally, this was written by a bishop of the Church of England—the thing that is really wonderful in the history of Grimshaw's extra-parochial labors is the non-interference of ecclesiastical authorities. How the incumbent of Haworth can have gone on for 15 or 20 years preaching all over Lancashire, [00:50:02] Yorkshire, and Cheshire without being stopped by bishops and archdeacons is very hard to understand.

But though he was never actually stopped, we must not suppose he escaped persecution. The prince of this world will never willingly part with any of his subjects. He will stir up opposition.

On one occasion, he was accused of preaching out of his own parish, and he was called up before the archbishop. "'How many communicants had you when you first came to Haworth?' He answered, "'Twelve, my lord.' "'How many have you now?' was the next question. The reply was, "'In the winter, from three to four hundred, and in the summer, nearly twelve hundred.' And on hearing this, the archbishop could only express his approbation and said, "'We cannot find fault with Mr. Grimshaw.'" Now, I'll stop there and not tell you any more of the story. But you'll see how—at least I hope you'll see—how that story illustrates the whole [00:51:03] truth, dark and shade, good and bad, about Sardis, about Protestantism.

There was in the first place a man with his garments fearfully, fearfully soiled by contact with the world. It was a man, at the very best, absolutely limited by the ecclesiastical system to which he

belonged, a person who had a very limited amount of truth to proclaim, but a man who went all out and was used by God as a lampstand.

What he knew, he witnessed, far and wide, to rich and poor, in the power of the seven spirits of God, he witnessed it.

And there were these few names in Sardis who did this. And considering what is said about their having not defiled their garments, the promise is that they shall walk with me in white.

[00:52:03] I suppose that what is said here about the Lamb's Book of Life is one of the things that may be found a little puzzling. With regard to the overcomer, with this I close, we read that I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life.

And we all, to begin with, say to ourselves, how can a person's name be blotted out of the Book of Life?

But of course, if we take the widest view of this particular point in Scripture, we can see that over the earlier part of Scripture, the Book of Life is only mentioned regarding a person being blotted out from it. And a good example is Moses.

If I can't, if you can't, go with us, then, he says, blot me out of thy book. And in the Psalms, it talks also about being blotted out of the Book of Life. [00:53:01] And we can see what it was here. Those who had a name to live, but those whose names were ostensibly in the Book of Life. But when all was said and done, and when the promises were made to these few insiders, it says, I will not blot out his name. All these others, I'm already saying, although they have a name to live, they are dead. But these, no, their names will not be blotted out of the Book of Life. And when we come in the end of the book to read about that particular thing, the Lamb's Book of Life, then those who have an entrance into that golden city, where God is the light and the Lamb is the Lamb, then they will be there, because their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and no name will ever be taken from this. Well, the message of Sardis, as the whole situation indicates, leaves an impression of imperfection, because it is an incomplete state. [00:54:04] And I do trust that there comes out from it, in the first place, a beginning of a glimmer of a wonderful appreciation of the work which has brought us, humbling as it should be to us, has brought us the knowledge as a daily substance of our understanding of Holy Scripture, the daily substance of our rejoicing in the Lord, the very things that were left short in the Reformation.

And to remember that even out of those dark and difficult days, there's a voice that seriously condemns us for our shortcomings relative to whether and to what extent we are lampstands.

The things that we are speaking of, they should be mediated to others, with one of my intentions that it should be so this week. The things we know regarding the gospel, if Grimshaw was so much on fire about it, then [00:55:04] we should at least be pleading day by day the command of the Lord Jesus Christ that we should pray that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.