

Series: Encounter

Sermon Title: Encounter the Dead & Compromised Church

Scripture: Selected Texts

- **Comments on Remodel and Restoration.**
- **Comments on Shepherd Roles:** Spiritual Guidance, Doctrinal & Church Oversight, Personal walk & Prayer

Introduction:

There are only two more weeks left in this year-long encounter series. If you are new to us this morning, what we have been learning this year is that an encounter with Jesus can change everything in your life. We have looked at all the different encounters that Jesus has had with people throughout scripture, from Genesis to the text today in Revelation. We looked at their life before their encounter with Jesus and what it looked like after. We saw how an encounter with Jesus brought fruit from barrenness... brought sight to the blind... brought purpose where there was none... and brought life where there was death.

Last week, we watched as Jesus encountered John on the Island of Patmos. Through this individual encounter, Jesus encounters not individuals but seven churches. We learn that in the Book of Revelation, the message is simple: Jesus is returning. So, he encounters these seven churches through John's letter to issue a warning about his coming. I hope that we learn from the behavior of these churches as we prepare for Jesus' return. After all, we are one day closer to his return than yesterday. Therefore, we would be remiss if we did not take the time to learn from their example.

We learned last week that all seven churches can be placed in 3 categories. The first category is what we looked at last week, represented by the church of Philadelphia, "the Faithful Church." We learned that the faithful church is a church that can discern God's voice by keeping to his word. In doing so, this church demonstrated its faith by walking through the open doors that God opens and does not try to open the doors He closes. Secondly, we learned that the faithful church is a church that walks within the protection that only God can provide. The text said this

faithful church would be “kept” from the hour of trial, the great tribulation. Finally, we learned that this church is a church that will receive a new name as they inherit the new heavens and the new earth. This means that just as this church was faithful in following Jesus through this life, they will follow him through trial and tribulation into life eternal.

Transition: Today, we will examine the other two categories of these seven churches. First, the church of Sardis. Turn to Chapter 3:1-6

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ -Rev. 3:1-6

The dead church is filled with counterfeits.

The first verse shows precisely what category this church fits into. Unlike Philadelphia, where Jesus had nothing but words of commendation, in this letter to Sardis, there are almost none.

Sardis was spiritually dead:

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. - Rev. 3:1

The first characteristic we see about this dead church is that a dead church is filled with counterfeits. The letter says they had a name that they were alive, but they were dead. This verse reminds me of a parable Jesus tells in Matthew 13:24

24 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ 28 He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along

with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'" - Mt 13:24–30.

This parable clues us into the reality that weeds have been scattered with the wheat. Jesus even continues in the text as he explains the parable:

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.- Mt 13:37–39.

As other translations put it, the weeds or chaff look just like wheat on the outside. However, as Moody puts it in his commentary, the chaff serves no purpose except that of hindrance. “The enemy places counterfeits[...] in the world to hinder the spread of the mystery form of the kingdom during the present age.”¹ This means that counterfeit believers will grow alongside authentic, faithful believers just as the wheat and the weeds exist side by side until Jesus returns.

Zebra Illustration:

This reminds me of a story I read this week about a student who visited a local zoo in Cairo. As this student walked by the zebra enclosure, he took a closer look at the animal only to realize that it wasn't a zebra at all... in fact, it was nothing more than a donkey with stripes painted on it. Take a look at the picture.

[Show picture of Zebra Donkey]

As he investigated further, he learned that this was not the first time the zoo had painted stripes on a donkey. The Zoo's proprietor told Reuters, “The first time we used paint, it didn't look good... The children don't know, so they call them zebras, and they are happy to see something new.”² While that is a funny story, the text tells us that Sardis was filled with donkeys with painted stripes. They were weeds that could shove, maneuver, and push out the wheat.

¹ Barbieri et al., *The Moody Bible Commentary*.

² “Donkey Painted as Zebra.”

I'm not going to lie to you. I have a concern about the Bible Belt. Before I moved out here from California, I had people who would criticize my move. Why are you moving to the south? Why would you move to the Bible Belt? California is in a deep spiritual crisis. I often responded to them with a question: What is easier, to introduce people to Jesus who don't know him or ... to introduce people to Jesus who think they already know him? While the South is the Bible Belt, the unfortunate reality that I have seen play out is people who are in a relationship with a culture or a trend. People who paint the stripes of church attendance, giving, and prayer on Sunday but let those stripes wash off as soon as they go into their homes, workplaces, sports, and schools.

The immediate concern that should be rising in your head is, how do I ensure I am not a donkey but a zebra? Well, Jesus communicates the difference in the remainder of the letter starting in v. 2:

2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. - Revelation 3:2-3

Counterfeits are brains on a stick.

We see from this text that the counterfeits will have the knowledge of the true Gospel; Christ admonishes them, "Remember therefore what you have received and heard, *and keep it, and repent.*" Unfortunately, Sardis is spiritually lifeless, and their dead heart will prevent them from letting that spiritual truth travel 18 inches to their heart.

Did you know that in biblical Greek, there are several different words to communicate the word "know" in English? Jesus when he gives the warning of separating the sheep and the goats back in Mt. 25. Jesus says there will be some who call me Lord Lord, Who cast out demons in my name, Who perform miracles in my name, and I will look at them and say depart from me for I never knew you. The word for know in Greek is the word *Ginoskow*. This word communicates experiential knowledge. You can read all the books you want about parenting, but every parent

knows that you know nothing about parenting until you become a parent yourself. Well, the same is true of your relationship with Jesus. You may mentally know a lot about Jesus and his word. You can probably proclaim and recite scripture, but let me ask: Do you know him? Have you experienced Jesus in a relationship? Do you have relational, experiential knowledge of Jesus?

Counterfeits know Jesus in their minds, but they have not experienced him in their hearts. The Church of Sardis, the Dead Church, is filled with counterfeits. While the counterfeit weeds may grow alongside the faithful wheat, they will eventually be separated. Jesus continues interpreting the parable in Mt. 13: 39-42.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. – Mt 13:39-42

Eventually, Jesus will return, and when he does, he will harvest the wheat and burn the weeds. We see this parable played out in the letter to Sardis.

Counterfeits will suffer God's judgment.

If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ -Rev. 3:1-6

The counterfeits of the Sardis church will suffer the judgmental destruction of God's fury. As one commentator notes, “During those last days, they will be blind to the imminence of the day of the Lord, which will, therefore, come upon them ‘just like a thief in the night.’”³ Unlike the faithful church abiding in God's protection, the dead church will not be protected. The

³ Kampen, *The Sign*.

consequences of this counterfeit faith and dead church are disastrous. God’s wrath will be poured out on the unregenerate church members, bringing to an end the spiritually dead stand in tragic contrast to the faithful, who are promised God’s protection during the hour of testing (the great tribulation) and safe deliverance out from within that hour just before the awesome day of the Lord.⁴

Transition: That’s the dead church of Sardis, but let’s move back to chapter two and look at the final category, which is the compromising church represented by the Church of Thyatira.

Starting in v.18.

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. 25 Only hold fast what you have until I come. 26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ - Rev 2:18–29.

The compromised church starts strong but finishes weak.

Unlike the dead church, what you see in this letter to Thyatira is that it starts with words of commendation. *“I know your works, your love and faith, and service and patient endurance...”*

That’s all good stuff, and then he follows it with... *“but your later works exceed your first.”*

Meaning y’all started strong but finished weak. As one commentator put it. “Many, perhaps most, believers in that church genuinely sought to be faithful and active in the things of the Lord. *‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance.’* Many

⁴ Kampen.

believers were growing spiritually, and the Lord continued His praise by acknowledging that their ‘deeds of later are greater than at first.’” This church started strong but finished weak. This compromising church was inconsistent.

Transition: So, the question becomes how could a church that starts strong become weak? Well, the answer to that question is found in the second characteristic of the compromised church. The Church in Thyatira began to give weight to more voices than Jesus’. Within the compromised church, Jesus’ voice is one among many.

Within the compromised Church Jesus’ voice is one among many.

As you can see in the letter, the people of Thyatira were engulfed in Jezebel's voice.

“I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads my bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to things sacrificed to idols.”

The Church of Thyatira began to let other voices, other words, speak louder than The Word. Unfortunately, this is playing out today within many churches. Just look at the United Methodist denomination as they are allowing the voice of culture and the LGTQA agenda to speak louder than scripture. Jesus says to love the sinner but not affirm the sin. The culture says that affirming the sin means loving the sinner. If we affirm sin, we erase the need for the Gospel... the need for Jesus or his teachings. Unfortunately, many evangelical churches today are not careful as to what voice is teaching their flocks-- instead, they prefer teachers who tickle the ears of people. Teachers who rationalize, allegorize, spiritualize, culturalized, or criticize scripture anything but take it for what it says at face value.⁵

As one commentator put it regarding this church:

False teachers in the church were corrupting the gospel and causing many true believers, Christ’s “bond-servants,” to stray from right belief and right living. It is probable that the name Jezebel, though in the singular, represented a group of unregenerate church leaders,

⁵ Kampen.

who, like the wicked Queen Jezebel of 1 Kings 16 and 2 Kings 9, were dedicated to undermining the work of God and corrupting the people of God.⁶

Friends, if you want to avoid becoming the compromised church of Thyatira, we mustn't let the voices of legislation, entertainment, and cultural trends speak louder than Scripture. Remember, what separated the faithful church from the compromised church is that they faithfully Kept to God's word even when it wasn't popular.

The compromised Church does not keep its guard up.

The way we keep our guard up is by keeping our focus. Keep our focus by knowing, studying, memorizing scripture, and keeping it in our hearts. One important lesson we can learn from this church is that true salvation is not in itself protection against false doctrine. Just because you engaged in a relationship with Jesus doesn't mean you can let your guard down. Many within the church of Thyatira trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior... they started strong. However, they began to let their guard down. As a commentator put it,

“The believer who is not regularly in God's word and continually seeking the guidance and strength of God's Spirit is easy prey for those who teach falsehood under the guise of Christianity... Satan, the great counterfeiter, deceives with half-truths, often using scripture out of context, as He did with Jesus in the wilderness temptations. If he believed that strategy would work with Jesus, he surely will use it against the followers of Christ, including those in the last days who will be facing great danger and will therefore be more vulnerable to deception and confusion.”⁷

Transition: It's important to note that true believers in compromised churches will not lose their salvation, but they will endure immeasurable persecution and suffering, from which faithfulness to their Lord and to His Word—like the Philadelphian church—would have otherwise protected them. In other words, the compromised believer will suffer the consequences of their decisions.

The compromised church will suffer the consequences of their decisions.

⁶ Kampen.

⁷ Kampen.

Christ reveals two things that will happen to those compromised in the last days. First, the false teachers “*will be cast upon a bed of sickness*” because of their corruption of Christ’s “bond-servants.” Second, believers who have committed spiritual adultery by following those false teachers will suffer “great tribulation unless they repent.” As one scholar put it.

“Although they will not forfeit their salvation, they will be subject to the greatest satanic persecution of all times- that is, the affliction, as noted above, that Jesus calls the Great Tribulation. They will experience this persecution because they will believe what they have been falsely taught, without testing the words of men against the Word of God.”⁸

The compromised church and believers will suffer the consequences of listening to other voices over scripture. The same is true today. If we choose to listen to the culture's voices on sexuality and gender, our marriage, our family, and our kids, we will suffer the consequences of those decisions. If we choose to live a life differently than how God instructed, while for a moment, it will feel great, but at some point, weeks, months, or years down the road, crap will hit the fan, and we will face the consequences of that decision.

Conclusion:

CCH family, how can we learn from our older siblings what to do and what not to do? It comes down to one thing. What do we do with Jesus? Do you know about having a relationship with Jesus, or are you in a relationship with Jesus? As in any relationship, are you allowing Jesus to speak into your life, marriage, family, work, culture, and politics? If it's not Jesus speaking into those things through his Word, then who or what is it?

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⁸ Kampen.