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**02 Oct 2005**

**Sardis: The Dying Church**

**Text : Rev 3:1-6**

**Speaker Rev James Chan**

*By Tina Wong*

Sardis was one of the great cities in the Roman Empire. A city of great strength with a wonderful reputation, an unconquered fortress but also a city of failure. It was conquered twice in its history because of carelessness. It was a commercial city for textile manufacturing and jewelry trade. Many were pagan worshippers. There were many secret religious societies, cults — a sinful city. In such a sinful and wicked city, a church was established there as a witness. A church that spoke of life and full of activities but spiritually dead.

In Revelation 3:2 and 3, Christ exhorted them to be watchful and to repent. Such a phenomenon may happen to any church today.

#### REVELATION 3:1

- Jesus introduced Himself as one having the *“seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”*. The *“seven spirits of God”* refers to the Holy Spirit as in Revelation 1:4.
- *“seven”* — divine number for completeness or fullness.
- The Lord Jesus Christ has the full support of the Holy Spirit in all His ministries (past, present, future).
- *“seven stars”* — refers to the messengers, the people whom God used to shine in darkness.
- *“in my right hand”* (Rev 1:20) — Jesus controls and directs them. He sends these messengers or ministers as shining stars. Ministers of God are to lead the people in the right way, in the path of righteousness. The believers are to follow the ministers as they shine and lead in the path of righteousness.
- *“has a name”* — Sardis church has a good reputation; it is a popular church which was active and progressive, full of life and vigour.
  
- But Jesus commented these three words: *“and art dead”*. Outward appearance is very deceiving. Sardis church was pronounced dead because they had no real communication with God. Although there were many activities going on they had no time for the Lord Jesus Christ. They were spiritually dead. Their prayers were of the lips and not of the hearts. They heard the messages in church regularly but they did not put it into practice.

James 1:22 says, "*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...*".

## REVELATION 3:2

- What they have done is only an outward show.
- "perfect" — fulfill. The church was not fulfilling the desire, plan and will of God. Such spiritual sickness may invade any church today. Let us examine ourselves on why we serve the Lord.
- What could be done for a dead church like Sardis?

### 1. Be watchful

A dead person can not be watchful but some members in the Sardis church were not dead but sleeping.

God called them to awake from their heavy slumber and be watchful. This command is very appropriate for Sardis as it has fallen twice by a surprise attack of the enemies.

Carelessness was the cause of the defeat. Therefore, we must be diligent in what God wants us to do.

### 2. To strengthen

The only thing that remains is their outward form of worship and activities, i.e. praying, preaching, teaching, witnessing. These are good but are outward forms.

Therefore, they must not abandon but strengthen them.

*"To strengthen"* means to build up, to put something into it, something that will give power, give life.

They have all these activities but they have no power or life.

### 3. To remember (v. 3)

It means to keep on remembering. They are to remember 2 things:

- a. Remember what they have received — eternal life, forgiveness of sin, spiritual gifts and the call to serve the Lord.

All these things are given for a purpose and we must follow the will of God.

- b. What they have heard — instructions from the Word of God to:

- Ø pray in the spirit (Jude 20)
- Ø preach in the spirit (1 Thess 1:5)
- Ø worship in the spirit — focus your mind on the Lord Jesus Christ
- Ø walk in the spirit (Gal 5:16)
  
- Ø live in the spirit (Gal 5:25). We must live the spirit-controlled life so that we can show to others Christ living in us.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to stay with us forever — to strengthen us, to help us, to lead, direct and guide us. In short, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and let God direct and lead us.

#### **REVELATION 3:5**

##### **The rewards**

###### **1. Clothed in white raiment**

Many in Sardis have defiled their raiment with sin. Those who repent will enjoy fellowship with Christ.

###### **2. Their names will not be blotted out from the Book of Life**

This Book records all the names of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

###### **3. Confess His name before His Father and before His angels**

The Lord Jesus Christ accepts us as His own.

**09 Oct 2005**

**Philadelphia: The Obedient Church**

**Text : Rev 3:7-13**

**Speaker : Dr Tow Siang Hwa**

*By Isabel Ng*

*"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev 3:7).*

### **Church of Brotherly Love**

The Church of Philadelphia is one of the 2 churches in Asia Minor that receives commendation from the Lord Jesus Christ. The word 'Philadelphia' means 'brotherly love'. Indeed, we Christians belong to one another, we have the same Heavenly Father.

### **Salvation: Privilege and Responsibility**

The message to the Church of Philadelphia — penned by the disciple John but it was the Lord Jesus who spoke the words. He is on the seat of David and only He hath the key of David. He also has power. He came to destroy Satan that we may have hope and calmness to face death. Growing old can be a joy because our Lord and Saviour has conquered death. This is salvation. God does that for us on the cross, so that we now have victory over death. That is not all to what's being a Christian is about. Duty follows salvation — a duty towards God to repay a little of the gospel debt to show that we are Christians. Salvation may be free to the sinners but it does not come cheap. Free salvation obliges all of us with a responsibility towards Him. He has saved us for a purpose to do something for Him.

Therefore, let's think of how you may help one another, e.g., say kind words, consider one another, do something to encourage someone. God knows our intentions.

### **One open door leads to many doors of opportunity**

*"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Rev 3:8).*

Some 30 years ago, God opened a door in the western part of Singapore — thus founded Calvary Jurong. There are many doors of opportunity that you do not expect until you go.

God had provided the land without cost to start Calvary Jurong. One provision leads to another — also founded Galilee BPC, Calvary Pandan and churches in other parts of the world, in Toronto, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Saipan and Sri Lanka. An open door is awaiting for us if we go in faith.

*No man can shut it* — God also uses weak people to do mighty things because He is powerful.

### **Read, love, keep and memorize**

*Has kept my word* — we cannot achieve anything for God without His word. It is a double-edged sword that can break the stronghold of Satan. Our understanding of the word that it is the truth comes through the aid of the Holy Spirit, and not by our own intelligence. Hence, we should continue to be faithful to use King James Bible in our churches. Are we reading it regularly? No? Why not? Read with understanding, with appetite, with illumination from the Holy Spirit. God will bless.

### **Hold up your faith!**

*"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"* (Rev 3:11).

The signs of the Lord's coming are becoming more imminent. *"For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars...For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places"* (Matt 24:5-7). Think of the epidemics and disasters that have occurred and are happening in our time. Are you holding up your faith? Are you witnessing? Are you going to the open door that the Lord has opened for you? Have faith and the word of God will arm you for the ongoing spiritual battle. Though we are not working for the rewards but God is just — go in faith.

### **Our real abode**

*"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name"* (Rev 3:12).

This is the reward for our faithfulness — a permanent place in the House of God. *"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his*

*temple*" (Ps 27:4). Our present home is not truly permanent. Only the residence above is perfect, without sin, sickness and sorrow. Do we have the desire to dwell in that place?

*"He shall go no more out"* — there is no end to the heavenly bliss when we abide there.

*"I will write upon him my new name"* — we, as true sons and daughters of God, are marked out by God as His family members.

*"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"* (Rev 3:13) — we require spiritual ears to know what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying.

May Calvary Jurong be filled with brotherly love and abide in truth like the Church of Philadelphia in more years to come. Amen.

**16 Oct 2005**

**Laodicea: The Useless Church**

**Text : Rev 3:14-22**

**Speaker : Rev James Chan**

*By Haw Shuen Siang*

Laodicea is the last of the 7 Churches in Asia mentioned in Revelation. These 7 Churches are actual churches in the cities. In another sense, these Churches also represent 7 Church Ages in Church history. The Churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea represent the Churches of the end time. The Church of Philadelphia is the church of the open door where the believers are on fire for the Lord, zealous in witnessing and preaching the Gospel. The Church of Laodicea represents the church of indifference and unconcern. There is a lack of commitment in the church, filled with half-hearted Christians. This is similar to many churches today.

What Christ says concerning the Laodicean Church.

- § Verse 14 — He first introduces Himself as “the Amen”. The word “Amen” means certainty, truth, often translated as “so let it be”.
- § Christ is faithful and true in everything, every word, every promise He says and makes (2 Cor 1:20). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). We can trust and rely on Him.
- § He is “the faithful and true witness”. He keeps His word and means what He says. Everything He says will come to pass. Therefore, His diagnosis on the Church of Laodicea is true and not distorted.
- § He is “the beginning of the creation of God”. Jesus is the source and origin of all life. He is the Creator (John 1:3).

Hence, let us heed what Jesus, the faithful and true witness, and the Creator has to say about the condition of the Church of Laodicea.

- § Verse 15 — Indifference. The Church of Laodicea was a lukewarm church. When we say we are lukewarm, it means that we are living happily in our comfort, complacent and do not see the need to burn for God. Such Christians lack commitment to God, are concerned only about self, proud, boastful and only pay lip service to God.
- § Lukewarm Christians are the most difficult to deal with. They know the teachings of the Bible but do not practise them. They don't have much interest in spiritual things.
- § Verse 16 — Jesus will spue them out of His mouth. He cannot stand this kind of behaviour. He will remove the candlestick from the Church and remove the opportunity for them to be a light bearer.

§ Verse 17 — Independent, “have need of nothing”. Laodicea was a wealthy city, a business hub. Laodicea was famous for 3 items — gold, black garment made of wool and eye-salve (an eye medicine).

§ They were rich in the eyes of men but wretched and miserable in the sight of God. There was not a single good comment of good works for them from Christ.

§ Here we see a church that is materially rich but spiritually poor. It is a useless church.

What the Lord counsels them.

§ Verse 18 — Christ used the vocabulary of the Laodicean businessmen to counsel them.

§ Gold — The Laodiceans have a lot of gold but this gold is not what God desires. Their gold is only good to buy things on earth but are of no use in heaven. Christ is the source of all riches. Believe in Him to obtain true riches.

§ Garment — The black garment of Laodicea cannot cover the spiritual nakedness of the people. They need a spiritual garment, a white garment that can only be obtained from Christ. This white garment will also set them apart from the garment worn by the rest of the world.

§ Eye-salve — The Laodicean eye-salve is only good for physical eyes, not for spiritual blindness. Only Christ can cure them of their spiritual blindness if they go to Him for help. The medicine given by Christ will allow them to see better spiritually.

Verse 19 — But Christ still loves them despite their lukewarmness. He still chastens them. And whom the Lord chastens, He loves. Christ wants to stir up their fire, wants them to repent of their pride.

Verses 20 — An invitation from Christ. He is standing at the door, knocking, wanting to enter into us. He desires to be in our hearts. Only we can open the door to let Him in.

Verse 21 — A promise from Christ. All believers will one day reign with Him. Remember that Christ is the Amen, He is true and faithful. As believers we are rich in Christ. We are a privileged people. May we keep our fire burning for Him and continue to serve Him to the utmost.

**23 Oct 2005**

**From lust to purity**

**Text : Matt 5:27-30; 2 Tim 2:22**

**Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew**

*By Mrs Alice Tan*

This portion of scripture is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus started with the Beatitudes which teach us the way a Christian should live. A Christian must constantly plead to God because of his need for Him. A Christian must have a strong desire to live a holy, righteous life before God. A real hunger and thirst for righteousness must be felt, reflecting our depraved state and consequently, the great need for God. If there is a need for God, there will be satisfaction by God.

In Matthew 5, Jesus moved on to help the early disciples understand the law which was distorted by false teachers in those times. He reaffirmed "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*" (Matt 5:17-18). He promised to preserve and fulfil all that God has said.

The Jews had a twisted understanding of the Law and abused them through the ages. Jesus wanted to bring back the high standard of morality once set when the Law was given to Moses.

Adultery is not only confined to sexual relationship of a deviant spouse, it encompasses sexual sins like fornication, homosexuality, and lesbianism.

"*Looketh*" (v 28) means to stare with earnest contemplation. To commit adultery in the heart is already sin to God.

To stop sin, one must firstly, recognize it as one's weakness and secondly, take the necessary steps to avoid and prevent it. The lure of sin is so real that Jesus demands that it be avoided at all costs. The illustration of the right eye and right hand in verse 29, suggests that even if it means to remove something very precious and dear to avoid sin, we must do it! Nothing is too precious that we cannot cut away if it causes us to sin!

Avoid the filth of the movies! Stay far from pornographic and suggestive websites! Get rid of that immoral filthy magazines, VCDs or novels you may have. "*Flee also youthful lusts...*" (2 Tim 2:22).

In Ephesians 5, God, knowing the weakness of wives to dominate, asked them to submit to their husbands. Likewise, God knowing the weakness of man, asked the husband to love his wife. He is to love his wife like no other but like the way Christ loves His church — unconditionally. Therefore, husbands especially, (though women may be increasingly guilty of breaking the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment) must not allow themselves to be in situations to be easily

tempted. So turn down assignments to tempting places alone or insist on going overseas with your wife.

If God is in us, we must see good fruits through our belief in Christ. If a Christian commits these sins, he must check even his own salvation.

Man may not know our secret sins but God knows. Jesus has promised to give His children the strength to avoid and overcome sin. Therefore, we need to earnestly plead with God to help us because of the poverty of our heart, because of the seriousness of sin. We are saved from our sins to live a righteous life before God. There must be a transformation of the heart to follow after God. We must hunger and thirst after His righteousness and be serious about our walk with Him, to reflect God's nature in our lives.

Straits Times (23 Oct 05) reported "Sex for Sale" by teenagers right here in little Singapore. This confirms the decadence of our society. Christian parents have to set high standards for themselves and be good moral examples for their children. They must protect their children from many angles — keep children away from materials with immoral contents. Watch what they read, the sites they visit on the internet; avoid the movies, avoid novels with wizardry and witchcraft that would lead them to idolatry; don't give children money freely to do what they like with their friends. If parents do not monitor their children closely and pray earnestly for them, they open their children to all kinds of sin. Christian parents cannot imbibe the carnality and casual attitude the society has towards sins and immorality.

We live in an age where many in the society are void of sense and judgement. Therefore, we as Christians in the society must set a high standard for ourselves and our children. We must pray that God help us deal with this serious sin of immorality and not break the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment.

**30 Oct 2005**

**Reformation : Pharisees and Sadducees**

**Text : Matt 16:6**

**Speaker : AP Dennis Kwok**

*By Benjamin Yeo*

*"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt 16:6).*

What is "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees"?

It was their doctrine of justification by works of the law. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious policemen who would catch those who broke the law.

The Sadducees believed that there was no resurrection, no angels and no spirits. In the name of God and Jehovah, the Pharisees and Sadducees would promote their doctrines and beliefs.

Jesus compares their doctrines to "leaven".

*"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal 5:9).*

Jesus warns his disciples to take note of their false teachings; if not, they would soon follow their beliefs. The people held the Pharisees and Sadducees in high regard, therefore this warning was necessary.

*"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31-32).*

In modern times, people believe that there are no absolute truth. You may believe in your truth and I may believe in mine. God's truth is all truth, but not all truth is God's truth. The truth is what God has given to us in His Word. Knowing Christ is knowing the truth. The truth of Christ's redemption at the cross of Calvary. According to the scriptures, Jesus is the truth. He is the Son of God.

**What does the truth make us free from?**

**1. Freedom from Ignorance and Bondage**

It sets us free from the ignorance of spiritual truth. The Pharisees and Sadducees were appointed to teach the truth, but they themselves did not know the truth.

*"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt 3:7).*

It sets us free from spiritual bondage. We need to trust in Jesus and not man. We cannot rely on others for our salvation.

**Are you ignorant? Are you in bondage?**

The Lord Jesus has given us His truth, let us not remain ignorant. Let us not be in bondage anymore. Would your life be transformed if you knew the truth? This transformation is what the Lord Jesus refers to as being "born again". Until you see the need of a Saviour, you will not seek the Saviour.

## **2. Freedom from Sin**

*"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (Jn 8:34).*

Sin is addictive. It can control your life. We are weak and vulnerable in the presence of sin.

Jesus has made it possible for us to be free from the bondage of sin. He obtained victory over sin at the cross. Through Christ, we have the power to run from sin. God is refuge from the temptation of sin. However, not many people want to be free from this bondage. The Pharisees were in bondage.

*"I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you" (Jn 8:37).*

The Pharisees had closed their hearts to Christ; they therefore could not hear the truth.

Today, with overwhelming evidence of the existence of God, people still choose not to believe. To believe means that they have to forsake their other beliefs. If they accept Christ, they must change their lives. They feel that it is too hard. The old man must die. The new man will be accepted by God. To those who fail to receive the truth, God will send them strong delusion.

*"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess 2:10-12).*

## What is the standard of truth?

It is not in the teachings of man. It is God's truth. God's truth never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. We have the absolute truth in our hands today.

*"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt 24:35).*

We can trust God's Word absolutely. For those who know the truth, live out the truth in your life. Practise the truth every day. The truth must transform us. We ought to be Christians who live out the Christian truth.

In the Reformation, the truth was brought to the people after over a thousand years in the dark ages.

God raised up faithful men and women to speak His truth. The truth had set the church free from the bondage of ignorance and sin.

*"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17).*

The just shall live by faith. It is this truth that has set us free.

Thank God for His Word, that we might be set free.

**06 Nov 2005**

**Thessalonica: The reproducing church**

**Text 1 Thess 1:4-9**

**Speaker : Rev James Chan**

*By Rudy Tan*

No church is perfect. The church in Thessalonica however, comes closest to this. This brings great joy to Paul and here in this chapter, Paul writes and comments on this church.

Paul shows us the characteristics of this church in Thessalonica:

- In Verse 4, Paul greets the people in the church by calling them "*brethren beloved*" which in Greek refers to the great men of God like Moses, Abraham, Joseph, etc. This can be applied to all who believe in Jesus. We are all children of God, "Beloved of God". As elected children of God, the Thessalonians showed this through their actions and life. Therefore, examine one's life to see if one is a born again Christian. When God elects (i.e. chooses) us to be His children, it is not because of our own actions. The basis of God's election is His wonderful love and grace. This is showed in Deuteronomy 7:6-8 where God told the Israelites why they were specially chosen. God loves us! We do not realise this until we are saved.
- Be followers and imitators of Paul who followed the Lord (verse 6). It is not easy for Jews to accept Jesus for they will be condemned by family and friends. Joy and afflictions are inversely related but if you have the Holy Spirit, you will have joy in Him. Only believers will have this privilege of experiencing joy in the midst of afflictions. In verse 7, Paul calls us to live exemplary lives and be examples for others to follow. This is especially important as in these last days, it is very difficult to differentiate between Christians and non-Christians.
- Another evidence of being born again is that the Thessalonians proclaimed and propagated the Gospel. The Christians in the Thessalonian church were not only receivers of the Gospel but also transmitters (verse 8). Paul heard of this good report from others during his travels. Here in our B-P church, a great deal of emphasis is placed on witnessing. We should be a witnessing church.
- All of us should respond to the Gospel as the Thessalonians did. Turn away from idols and sin. Serve God and wait for His return (verse 9). The Lord may return again anytime to take us to the promised place prepared for us. We will be rewarded for our service in His name. People may not know what we have done but the Lord knows and we will be rewarded accordingly.

What are we living for today? Are we waiting for Him, serving and witnessing for Him? Therefore let us emulate the church in Thessalonica and live a transformed life; in so doing be an example to others and the Lord's Name be praised

**13 Nov 2005**  
**Philippi: The Caring Church**  
**Text: Philippians 2:1-4**  
**Speaker: Rev James Chan**

*By Audrey Tan*

*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

*Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

Acts 16 records the beginning of the church at Philippi. Paul did not have a plan to plant a church in Philippi but God led him there. While in Troas, God gave Paul a vision of a man of Macedonia appealing to Paul to go to Macedonia. In Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, Paul witnessed to Lydia and she and her household came to know the Lord, and were baptized. While in prison, Paul and Silas witnessed to the keeper of the prison, and he too was converted. They were the first few members of the church in Philippi. Even after Paul left the city, they continued in the work of the Lord, witnessing to the people in Philippi.

**Lessons to learn from the church of Philippi**

**1. Evangelistic fervour of the people**

Evangelism was the main emphasis of the church from the very beginning. God led the missionary team from Asia and Europe. Paul witnessed to the Gentiles and Acts 16:14 records Lydia's conversion. The two-fold work of the Holy Spirit was seen in Lydia's conversion. One, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia and enabled her to accept the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Two, the Lord used Paul's message to touch the heart of Lydia. Evangelism is the work of God through the Word of God by God's people.

When Paul and Silas were in prison, they did not fail to give thanks to God. They sang hymns and prayed. God used them to witness to the prisoners and the keeper of the prison. God worked in various ways to bring salvation to the people. He used earthquake, circumstances, singing of hymns and prayers to bring the gospel to the people.

The people in the church of Philippi continued in the work even after Paul left them. (Phil 1:5). The Lord has given the Great Commission to bring God's word to the people and this is the main ministry of the church.

## **2. Emphasis on Baptism**

When the people accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, they were immediately baptized (Acts 16: 15, 33). Paul took God's commandment to baptize believers very seriously.

## **3. Teaching the Word of God**

Paul taught the believers the Word of God. The various doctrines are taught in Paul's epistle to the Philippian church. They include Doctrine of Man — Anthropology (Phil 3:8, 17-18), Doctrine of Christ — Christology (Phil 1:19, 2:5-11), Doctrine of Church — Ecclesiology (Phil 1:1), Eschatology (Phil 1:6, 10, 20-21), Doctrine of Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1), Theology (Phil 3:14, 4:17).

## **4. Church System**

In Phil 1:1, three groups of people were mentioned in this verse:

- a. saints in Jesus Christ — believers of Christ
- b. bishops — elders who oversee the spiritual welfare of the church
- c. deacons — servants of the church

The church in Philippi shows a biblical pattern of the early church and we ought to follow this pattern.

## **5. A Church of Prayer**

When Paul was in prison, he asked the believers in Philippi to pray for him. Where did the people learn about the importance of prayer?

- a. They learnt from Lydia who has the habit of praying and continued steadfastly in prayer.
- b. Paul was a man of prayer and he set a good example and encouraged others to pray (Phil 1: 3, 4).

## 6. Worship God with a Joyful Attitude

The word "joy" was mentioned at least 13 times in the Philippian epistle. Paul reminded the people to rejoice and this was the spirit in the church of Philippi. (Phil 4:4).

## 7. A Caring Church

Lydia and her family, and the keeper of the prison opened their homes to the missionaries to stay. When Paul departed for Corinth, the church supported him (2 Cor 11:9). When Paul was under house arrest in Rome, the people prayed for him. The people from the Philippian church cared for Paul and supported his ministry and set a good example for us to learn from.

We should be a caring church to care for God's people, fulfill the Great Commission and be a channel of blessing to others. May we learn from the church in Philippi.

## V The Great Commission

Matthew 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

**20 Nov 2005**

**Corinth: The Adolescent Church**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

**Speaker : Rev James Chan**

*By Mrs Winnie Loh*

The church in Corinth had much potential but unfortunately it had allowed culture and lifestyle to penetrate, creating many problems and hindering its growth.

### Condition of the church in Corinth

The church in Corinth was planted by the Apostle Paul. Corinth is a key city and an important commercial centre during Paul's time. People from all walks of life gathered, therefore bringing about the evil culture. The morale was low and reputation was bad till today. Paul founded Corinth during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary trip, and after 18 months of preaching, many Corinthians, including Titus, Crispus, Sosthenes, as well as other Gentiles, came to know Christ. The Church in Corinth had both commendable and condemnable features.

### Commendable features

- **It had spiritual potential.** They had good teachers, preachers and leaders to deliver knowledgeable and enriched speeches. Paul, Peter and Apollos were able to teach very well. There were many spiritual gifts, and there was no lack of talented Christians.
- **It was a church of prayer.** They were praying Christians, and Paul thanked them for their support in prayer (2 Cor).
- **It stood firm for the Lord.** Paul commended that "...by faith ye stand" (2 Cor 1:24). Although they stumbled, backslided and fell, they never denied the Lord but continued in their Christian worship.
- **It hold fast to sound doctrine.** They remembered the teachings of Paul (1 Cor 11:2) and upheld sound doctrine, like our Bible Presbyterian Churches.

With these commendations, the Church should be growing but it was not so. It had received a lot of condemnation from Paul. The Church was like people in their adolescence.

### Condemnable features

- **Division of the Church.** There were divisions arising not from doctrinal issues, but from favouritism. They became hero-worshippers, some favouring Paul, others favouring Apollos, Peter or the Lord Jesus Christ. The church was divided! Paul had to appeal to them to be united by emphasizing that Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13). Paul wanted them to be God-centered instead of honoring man, for one day we will be judged for our actions (1 Cor 3:10-15).

- **Spiritual immaturity.** They were babes in the Lord, weak and immature such that jealousy and strife for personal gains had arisen in the church.
- **Tolerance of sin.** Sin of immorality had crept into the church but they had tolerated it such that even the unbelieving Corinthians could not bear. They had brought brethren to court instead of consulting spiritual leaders (1 Cor 6:1-6), and with their immorality, brought shame and bad testimony to the church. Paul had to remind them to flee fornication and to preserve their body (1 Cor 6:18-20).
- **Taking food offered to idols.** They were liberal with food offered to idols, and had stumbled many fellow believers. Paul reminded them that "*whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor 10:31).
- **Profaning the Lord's Supper.** There was no preparation of hearts or humility when participating in the Lord's Supper. Instead, there were divisions in status between the rich and poor, different existing groups and drunkenness from feasting. They had to be reminded by Paul of proper behaviour in honoring the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11).
- **Selection of Spiritual gifts.** The Holy Spirit had given the Corinthians spiritual gifts to do the work and edify the church. The Christians in Corinth did not submit to the Holy Spirit but had deliberately chosen specific spiritual gifts that they wanted, so as to edify themselves and their ego.
- **Failure to correct false doctrine.** False teaching denying resurrection of the dead had crept into the church (1 Cor 15:12) but the Christians in Corinth had not only failed to rectify but tolerated the false teaching.
- **Slow to give.** The Christians in Corinth were slow to give and failed to deliver what they had promised, although being rich. Instead, it was the poorer Christians in Macedonia who had helped the churches in Jerusalem when they were in need.

What was the cause of all those problems? It was Satan's activities (1 Cor 2:11, 7:5). The serpent could beguile God's people very subtly. We recalled how Satan deceived Eve and Peter by corrupting their minds. Satan could similarly deceive us today. We need to beware for we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against principalities. 1 Cor 13 tells of what true love is — if we truly love one another, we should care for one another, talk about and discuss differences in a brotherly, loving manner. We should let the love of God constrain and dwell in our hearts, and show love for one another, practise what we have learnt from God and have peace in the church.

**27 Nov 2005**

**Walk ye in the old path**

**Text : Jeremiah 6:16**

**Speaker : Rev Edward Paauwe**

*By Mrs Chen Mi Sen*

*Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

Let us heed the word of God and ask for the old path:

1. Path of Purity
2. Path of Humility
3. Path of Heaven

Path of Purity

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

What is inspiration? It is the extraordinary, supernatural influence exerted by the Holy Spirit on writers of the sacred books. The words these writers wrote were not their own words but the words of God and are therefore infallible. The entire Bible, 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New, are given by inspiration of God.

God's Word teaches us:

- a. what is right
- b. what is wrong with our lives
- c. how to make things right
- d. how to keep things right

"...If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev 22:18-19).

Believers need to watch that they do not subtract from the Word of God, neither do they add to the Word of God. They must be careful that what they believe is based on the Word of God, not their personal beliefs and convictions.

If a church's doctrinal statements are not supported by Bible verses, then they are no more than personal views.

Be aware of what is in the Word of God.

Deut 29:29 The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The Bible is a complete revelation of God, no more and no less. We should believe only things which are clearly revealed to us in the Word of God.

*"The secret things belong unto the Lord"* — there are certain things that God has not revealed to mankind. These are secrets we do not know. Men need to humble themselves and say: "We do not know".

### ***Path of Humility***

Look at the life of Jesus Christ — humility stands out constantly. Christ forsook the glory and splendour of heaven and came down to earth to die for you and me. He took the form of a servant in order to save mankind. He humbled and became obedient unto death. That is humility.

Believers likewise should humble ourselves and remember that:

- a. God resists the proud
- b. God gives grace to the humble.

Path of Heaven

God's kingdom is not on this earth.

God's kingdom is in Heaven.

The believers' hope is in heaven and we have been shown the path of light which leads to heaven. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (Jn 3:16).

Men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are miserable and wretched sinners who have been saved by the amazing grace of God.

Key truths for every believer:

- a. God's love for me is undying
- b. God's purpose for me is Christ-likeness
- c. God's Word for me is the final right answer
- d. God's grace for me is sufficient

These four precious promises would steer us as we continue on the old path which leads to heaven.

**04 Dec 2005**

**Antioch: The sending church**

**Text: Acts 13:1-4**

**Speaker: Rev James Chan**

*By Catherine Leong*

#### Brief History of the work in Antioch

Antioch was situated about 300 miles north of Jerusalem and about 20 miles east of the Mediterranean Sea. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Antioch was the capital of the province of Syria and was also the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the whole Roman Empire. Being a cosmopolitan and commercial centre, it had a population of around 500,000. The Jews comprised 30% of this figure, and the city was a melting pot for the Greeks, Romans, Semitics, Arabs and Persians. It was also famous for its chariot races, pursuit of pleasure, pagan worship, licentious and sexual indulgences.

#### How did the gospel spread to Antioch?

In Acts 11, we learn that the first persecution broke out in Jerusalem and that Stephen was martyred. Many believers were scattered and some fled to Antioch. The gospel thus reached Antioch mainly by the following modes:

- The Jews from Jerusalem who went to Antioch to witness,
- Believers from Cyrene and Cyprus, who without any letters in hand nor instructions from their Churches but with burning zeal and desire in their hearts for the gospel to reach the unsaved.

These people came to evangelize with a simple faith, and had the belief that God's hand was always with them; they were anxious to share the good news. "*And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord*" (Acts 11:21). The good news of the gospel spread all the way from Antioch to Jerusalem, and many who heard came to believe! Word had it that the Jews were also preaching to the Gentiles! Barnabas was then sent to investigate and unravel the truth of this marvellous hearsay. To his delight, he saw that God was truly working in Antioch and many Gentiles were being converted; he exhorted and encouraged the people to stay close to the Lord (Acts 11:23). The Church from thence flourished and grew, so much so that Barnabas had to call in Paul to render extra support! With heart and soul, they continued to teach the Word of God to the people.

The number of believers multiplied tremendously and others outside the flock were beginning to label them as "**Christians**". This was the first time the word "Christian" appeared in the Bible (Acts 11:26). Before attaining their identity as Christians, they were assigned names such as: Disciples, Saints, Brothers or Witnesses. A Christian would thus be likened to one who belongs to Christ, following Him and living like Him.

## Commendable features of the Church

1. The Christians were bold and not afraid nor ashamed of their public profile. They witnessed for the Lord wherever they went, and confessed Christ's deity and Lordship over all. It is important to take note that as Christians, we bear the name of Christ before men. Therefore, there is an inherent need for us to evangelize and continually witness for Him. This is of utmost importance!
2. Spiritual growth of the Church

Acts 11:21, 24 — The hand of God was upon the people and the Word of God was taught with power. The Church grew as a result of this.

3. Teaching of God's Word (Acts 11:19-20)

In Antioch, the teachers were committed and taught the word of God seriously wherever they went. Such prophets and teachers like Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1) also taught God's word and the Church in Antioch grew. They emphasized on the teaching ministry, i.e. Bible Study and the Lord blessed the ministry. Even though the church at Antioch had grown, they did not forget the Great Commission to be missions minded. Acts 13:1-4 gives us a glimpse of the principles in running a mission, such as the pre-requisites and requirements to elect its leaders.

A church leader must minister to the Lord (Acts 13:2) and be prepared to do spiritual work. He must be sincere, willing to volunteer and sacrifice his time for the Lord in his service. He must also be serious and committed to his work for the Lord. Commitment is essential for church leaders and every one of us.

The leaders in Antioch were responsive. They fasted and prayed showing their commitment, seriousness and sincerity (Acts 13:2) in their service for the Lord. The Holy Spirit began to work in them, directing them in the decisions and tasks being carried out. Only the Holy Spirit is able to convince and convict a person to go into missions work. Here we see Barnabas and Paul, each being led to their calling even when they did not volunteer for this field of work. We must thus be prepared to heed the call whenever it comes!

The Church in Antioch submitted to the Lord, and sent Barnabas and Paul to the mission field. Their laying of hands on Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:3) was a symbolic identification on a candidate for the ministry. Although the Church had appointed both of them, it was the Holy Spirit who sent both of them to the mission field. The Holy Spirit is the One who will work in the heart of the would-be missionary. Indeed, the Christ-centred Church in Antioch can be called the Sending Church.

*"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest"*  
(Matt 9:37-38).

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit reminds each and every member of our church of His Great Commission.

May the Holy Spirit continue to lead and guide each and every of us to love, care and encourage one another.

**11 Dec 2005**

**Jerusalem: The first church**

**Text: Acts 2: 40-47**

**Speaker: James Chan**

*By Miss Ye Zu Yi*

Our Calvary theme for 2005 is: Christ and His Church.

There are many lessons that we can learn from the church in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church is the 1<sup>st</sup> and the best model representation of all subsequent churches. We, living in the modern days, ought to follow after the pattern of this church.

7 lessons to be learnt:

- 1) They had a high view and regard of the Scriptures.
  - The people believed that the Bible is the one and only source and authority in all their ministries.
  - There were many instances where Peter quoted from the Scriptures (Acts 2-4).
- 2) They were very dependent on the Holy Spirit.
  - The book of Acts can also be known as "The acts of the Holy Spirit".
  - Before Christ ascended into heaven, He promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit will be with them in their work.
  - The word "Holy Spirit" appears 55 times in the book of Acts.
- 3) They were very strong in prayer.
  - Acts 2:42 - "... continued stedfastly... in prayers."
  - Acts 4:3 - "And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide."
  - Acts 6:6 - "Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."
- 4) They were fervent in missions and evangelism.
  - Acts 8:26 - Philip evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch.

- Acts 10 – Peter ministered to Cornelius.

5) The church was a growing church.

- More and more came to know Christ. Note that persecutions in the church will not kill the church; instead, the believers will grow even stronger.

6) They were involved in church activities.

- They got themselves baptized and were involved in fellowship with one another.

- Heb 10:25 – To provoke one another to love and good works.

7) They were concerned for one another.

- Acts 2:44-45 – They had all things in common. They sold and gave to help one another.

**18 Dec 2005**

**The house of God**

**Text: Gen 28:10-22**

**Speaker: Rev James Chan**

Jacob's dream at Bethel is an interesting account. At this time, he was a young man who had earlier bought his brother's birthright with soup. He also deceived his father into blessing him instead of his brother. The family was thus divided. His brother, Esau also wanted to kill him. Jacob therefore had to flee from his home at Beersheba to Bethel and then to Haran.

While Jacob was on the run to Bethel, he had probably felt lonely, frightened and homesick. In addition, he might be smitten of his conscience for what he had done to his brother and wondered what uncertain future would lie ahead of him.

Then, God appeared to Jacob on his first night away from home. Jacob discovered Him to be merciful and forgiving because He promised to be with Jacob wherever he went.

At one point of time or another, we might have felt that God is nearer to us than any time, especially when we face trouble or when we look at God's creation. It feels like we are in the House of God.

Jacob had the same experience when he fell asleep after a long journey from home to Bethel and dreamt of heaven.

Lessons learnt from Jacob's dream:

- *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth" (Gen 28:12).*

The great ladder is the stairway reaching to heaven that allows the angels to ascend and descend.

It signifies that there is a great gulf between man and God, and man can never reach heaven. Jacob realized that he is helpless on his own accord but God has prepared a way for mankind.

In John 1, the Lord Jesus said that He is the way to heaven. He also told Nathaniel and his disciples the same in John 14:6 *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"*.

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Jn 1:51).*

The students in OT would know that these words refer to Jacob's dream.

- *"and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it"* (Gen 28:12).

The angels refer to the messengers of God. They have special functions in dealing with the believers

- They protect and deliver.

*"For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways"* (Ps 91:11).

*"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them"* (Ps 34:7).

*"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them"* (Isa 63:9).

The angel of the Lord helped the apostle Peter to escape from prison (Acts 12:7-11).

- They are very active in serving the Lord.

When Daniel and his friends refused to bow down to the golden image and were sent to the fiery furnace, the angel of the Lord appeared and protected them from the fire. Angels also appeared to Joseph and Mary to go to Egypt to escape from those who wanted to kill baby Jesus.

- They encouraged believers.

*"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven"* (Matt 18:10).

We see that God has numerous angels to look after His believers — to protect, to lead and to guide.

- God has power over all things (Gen 28:13). He has the power to fulfill his promise to Abraham. He has the power to take care of Jacob's family while he was away. He has the power to lead him as he sought a wife. God is able to handle all his problems for him. Last but not least, He has the power to work all things well. Things may not appear pleasant but God is able to work out all things well to His glory.
- God assured Jacob and us that we are worshipping a God whom we can trust. In Genesis 28:13, God revealed to Jacob who He really is — the God who saved Abraham, the faithful God. The real blessings are now here given by God to Jacob, that he would have numerous children. The Lord Jesus would also come through the family of Jacob. These promises enabled him to face the uncertain future with confidence. Feeling encouraged with God's presence, he called this place the house of God and renamed it Bethel.

What does a church do for the believers?

- The Word of God is preached

- Dwell in the presence of God

These require us to seek Him sincerely.

May God help us seek His word and His presence truthfully and faithfully till He come.

**25 Dec 2005**

**Treasures you can keep**

**Text: Luke 2:8-9**

**Speaker : Rev James Chan**

*By Miss Eileen Chee*

Christmas is a joyous occasion when we share many things with others. To Mary, Christmas was very special to her. She had been chosen of God to give birth to the Son of God Himself. Shepherds and wise men came to present gifts even though she did not know who they were. Mary treasured all these and kept them in her heart.

### First Treasure

God has promised to send a Messiah to be born of a virgin, as prophesied in Isaiah 700 years ago. Mary was very shocked when angels came to declare to her this Great News. Yet, she submitted herself to the LORD, allowing God to use her in whatever way He desired.

The people of Israel were under the power of Rome. Israel was no longer the strong and mighty nation it used to be in her glorious past. Where was God in all these sufferings? There were no more voices of the prophets. To the people, God has chosen to remain silent during the years of captivity. Mary wondered. However, the birth of Jesus Christ had shown to the Israelites that God indeed kept His word. The problem with Christians nowadays is our failure to see God's love in every circumstance. We must understand that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:8-9) — unexpected ways and unexpected timing. The faithfulness of God and His word is a treasure that we must keep, just as Mary had done. We must treasure the Word of God.

### Second Treasure

The real need for people today is for a Saviour to save them from their sins. We destroy others with the things we do and say, and in like manner, we destroy ourselves too. We are completely powerless and without any ability to free ourselves from the bondage of sin. Paul had aptly put it in Romans 7:18 "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*". Sin often leaves its mark on us. It also comes in many forms in the lives of the rich and the poor, the young and the old, men and women.

Thank God that no matter who we are and how heavy our sins, He can save us and change our lives. This is the conviction that Mary held on to — that Christ was born to save men from sins and this she deeply treasured.

### Third Treasure

It is the joy of knowing and experiencing God. Mary was personally involved in this. She took the effort to remember the events that had transpired before, during and after the birth

of Jesus so that she could understand and figure out God's plan for her. Her affection and love were involved in the experience, and so was her intellect. "*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*" (Lk 2:19). We should emulate Mary if we want to have the joy of knowing and experiencing God.

As a result, there are a few implications:

Firstly, Jesus is our Jehovah, our Lord. Jesus is not just man, He is also God. This reminds us of Thomas' confession of Christ when he personally touched the wounds of Christ after His resurrection. He exclaimed with deepest devotion "*My Lord and my God*" to Jesus Christ in John 20:28.

Next, He is the Lord of our minds and thoughts. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus bid us to learn of Him. We are to take up our cross and follow Christ. Jesus Christ is our Teacher. We must learn the way of Christ from the Bible. We must practise and proclaim what the Bible says. We must behave according to the Word of God.

Lastly, He is the Lord of our lives. Our lives consist of time, career, ambitions. We must let God take control of all these aspects of our lives and thank Him for doing so.

### **Conclusion**

To Christians, we are to do what God desires and be committed to Him. It is good to be like Mary to keep such treasures in our hearts so that we may be close to God.

To friends, this season is a good time to consider the Saviour who was born in a lowly manger. Accept His gift this season and you will be truly blessed.

---The End ---