

Our eyes open, we're in the dock. Lawyers stand before us and the gallery is packed with interested onlookers. The judge begins to speak and they're all looking at us. The question before the court is clear. Are we a Christian?

How's this trial going to go? Of course, we go to church or we wouldn't be here today. Of course, we sing when the words come up but outside of that, what evidence can be presented? Is the way we live any different to someone who wants nothing to do with Jesus?

Will the evidence of our lives be enough to convict us of being a Christian or will this case show that we never really believed in the first place? We might have looked good on the outside but we never really trusted Jesus. Perhaps never really began to change in our hearts.

Jesus asked this kind of question to the Christians in Sardis 2000 years ago and he was clear with them - your deeds are not enough - you're just like everyone else in your city.

In this first part of Revelation, Jesus has been speaking to seven ancient churches, challenging and encouraging them. Here's what Sardis looks like today

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It's to the east of Modern day Turkey and it used to be the western end of the Persian Empire (modern day Iran). It was famous for its coins but also for this building in the middle of our photo.

A temple to Artemis. Most people were worshipping here, not at church. They were living for Artemis, the fertility Goddess not for Jesus.

In the church in Sardis, some (v4) were different - they were remaining faithful but many of them in v4, have soiled their garments. It seems like, outside of the church building, they were just like everyone else. Will you go to the festival on Saturday? I guess so. Will you join in the prayer at work? yes.

They went to church on a Sunday, they read the bible, they said they were Christians but, outside of church on a Sunday they look just the same as everyone else.

So Jesus warns them in v2 - Wake up before it's too late. Repent - turn all of this around. Come back to Jesus and say sorry and ask him to change your heart. Do we need to hear this this morning? How are our deeds?

I'll talk about these points today:

slide 2 + 1

407

Our faith is not about deeds is it? It's about grace. One day, there will be a court case for us. One day, Jesus, Rev 20, Jesus will judge the living and the dead. On that day, everything we've done will be out in the open but, if we believe in Jesus, he's taken all the punishment we deserve on the cross.

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Therefore, in our trial, Jesus will get up and say "I'll pay the fine - let him go free". God loves us so he sent Jesus to die for us so that our deeds won't lead to punishment.

Instead, they'll be forgiven. And so, if we believe in Jesus, we are saved - we will be with God forever, no matter what we do.

So is the Jesus of Revelation 3 the same Jesus who did this for us?

It's our faith in Jesus that saves us but our deeds are an outward sign pointed towards the genuineness of our faith. If we want to ask - is there anything really in there? Did we really repent and believe in Jesus at the start then we have to look at our deeds.

And so we need to be careful with Jesus's call to repent here in Revelation 3. Because this warning is not for this person:

slides 1 (on knees in desperate prayer)

Christians who make mistakes and sin but are getting on their knees and saying - Jesus - help me - I want to change - I don't want to be like this - I want to serve you as king. This is a repenting Christian.

No - the Christians in Sardis were like this:

Slide 1 (sleeping in a chair)

They were living like everyone else and they didn't even care.

Is that us this morning?

294

So, let's return to this question of "how are our deeds? Firstly:

slide 1

Have you seen these kind of clothes on TV?

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It's a burqa(ブルカ). In Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia it's quite common. When you wear this, really, nobody can see what's on the inside. You can have a life at home, where you have your long hair out and you wear shorts and a T-shirt and put on your make up but the person people see in the street is completely different.

These Christians in Sardis had, like this, two very different faces. During the week, v4, they were soiling their clothes. They were at the temple of Artemis eating the meat sacrificed to idols and, if you said to someone, - that's a Christian. They'd have said - "surely not - they're like everybody else".

On Sunday they were in their seat at church and if you said to the faithful Christians - look at what they were doing on Wednesday night - they would have said "Is that really Kenji-san? I don't believe it".

Do we have a second life outside church that we'd rather people didn't see?

What about when we choose what to watch on TV?

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Is our TV viewing good evidence that we are Christian? Or do we watch what everybody else watches even if it's filthy that Jesus died for?

What about the way we spend our money?

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Normally, nobody sees it. If we could see it, would our giving and our fun and our care look any different to anyone else?

What do we do when someone starts spreading a rumour at work or among our friends?

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Do we, like everyone else, laugh a little and say "that's right, isn't it?" Or do we remember who we are? Do we remember that Jesus bought our lives at a high price and that the person at the centre of this rumour is someone who our Father God loves and longs to welcome into His family?

Do the contents of our conversations say "this person loves Jesus" or do they say - "here's a normal person"? Do we feel the love of the God who made us in our hearts and long to be able to share that with others? Do we hear other people's problems and think - I want to tell you about the saviour who loves you and can help you or do we just nod?

Do we have a different face here to the face at home or at work?

Because Jesus v1, has the seven stars and the seven Spirit. Jesus was with his church then listening and encouraging, speaking and challenging. And he's here with his church now. He's with us here and at home and at work and so he knows what we're doing.

We can hide what's in our conversations out there from the other people at church. We can hide how we use our money from our colleagues at work. We can hide what we watch on TV from our parents or husband or wife. We can't hide anything from Jesus. He knows what we're doing.

What fools we are sometimes! To think that we can fool God by looking good on the outside when he sees everything we do. He wants to come and change us, starting in our heart so that we overflow with love and hope and our lives are radically changed and sometimes we'd like to offer him something shallow.

But does it really matter? We're church members, right? We're missionaries right. We're the pastor, right? Surely, we're OK?

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Looking at our deeds and asking - if this was a trial would their evidence of our faith? - this isn't just an interesting story. It's a serious question.

Because these deeds are pointing towards the genuineness of our faith and what profit does that have. Be careful, Jesus because you have these two things before you. Two destinations. The other day, I got on the motorway in Morika to go home and I went on in the direction of Aomori. Thankfully, it wasn't long but I lost my concentration and ended up going the wrong way. It only cost about 100yen.

The destinations here and the consequences for mistakes here are much more serious.

The one who conquers - the one whose faith proves genuine in the end will be clothed in light and have his name written in the book of life. God will say - this is my child - welcome into the new creation. We will be singing God's praises for ever - we will enjoy a perfect world with no pain and no regrets and no mistakes. We will love and be loved by our God and saviour.

And the alternative in v2 is death. Separation from God forever. Matt 7 - if our faith was just for the outside there's a danger that God will say:

"I never knew you, get away from me".

Jesus says - don't have regrets that last forever! Don't fall asleep v2 thinking -

"It's fine that my life outside of here isn't distinctive at all". Don't throw away the prize that lasts forever because you want to be like everybody else. Be different and ride with me into eternity.

So finally, we have to ask,

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What do we think about our own lives. If someone saw a video of everything we did last week - would they say - this person is definitely a Christian or would it be hard for them to tell?

Have we fallen asleep? The creator of the universe send his perfect, only son, to suffer and die on a cross so that he could be with us forever. Now, he's come to live inside us through his Holy Spirit and He's beginning to make us holy. That should change us. We should shouting this from the rooftops. This should change our TV viewing, our use of money, our friendship and what we do in them. This should change every part of our everyday. Is it?

If not, the answer if wonderfully simple isn't it? v3 (read start)

Let's look back at the gospel. Let's rejoice again in the saviour who stepped from heaven to save us because he loves us. Do you know him. Will you not believe in him? Let's repent. Let's say Jesus - I love you and I've not lived for you. I've lived just like everyone else. In front of everyone, at home, at work, when I'm on my own, may my deeds show that I belong to Jesus.

Let's pray (time of silence first)