

Series: Timeless Truth's For Today's Church

Title: Sardis: The Dead Church

Text: Revelation 3:1-6

We've been looking at the 7 churches that Jesus addresses in chapters 2&3 of the book of Revelation and have been unpacking the words of condemnation and commendation that Jesus has for the churches.

These churches, while literal churches in the first century that spread out along Asia Minor also represent all churches that exist during the church age ... churches that deal with the same challenges and struggles throughout the history of the church ... and so Jesus's words to them are also extended to us ... which is why we're calling this series: Timeless Truth for Today's Church.

I mentioned last week that we see a bit of a progression that's taking place among the churches that Jesus brings correction to ...

In Ephesus we saw "love distracted", love compromised and wrongly prioritized...
In Pergamos we saw the church remained silent when a few from within mingled pagan practices with God's truth ...

In Thyatira we saw the same sin, however the longer it went on, the more tolerated it became and the more the mixing of "truth and error" became a part of the larger culture of the church...

What started as a distracted love in Ephesus, set the stage for a small group of compromisers in Pergamos which grew to a larger group in Thyatira... which we'll see is full blown in the church at Sardis.

I remember a few years back we took a cross country camping trip and were staying at a campground just outside Zion National Park where there was zero light pollution ... I've never experienced such open air darkness in my life ...

But the darkness created an opportunity to capture a pallet of stars above unlike I've ever seen before ... it was a clear night and the beauty of that scene is forever chiseled into my memory... they all appeared to be so much closer...

However, something that's interesting about determining the distance of stars... the distance of stars are measured in "light years" It's not based on time but on the distance it takes for it's light to travel.

The closest star to us, other than the sun is **Proxima Centauri** – which is about 4.24 light years away ... which means it takes 4.24 years for it's light to reach our sight ...

So, if Proxima Centauri were to die out and fall from the sky, it would take over 4 years before we ever knew it ...

In other words, we'd be seeing the appearance of a star, but in actuality, its not there ... it's dead!

The same can be said about the church in Sardis ... it had the "appearance" of being alive ... but they were dead!

Let's begin to take a look at the church of Sardis...

Revelation 3:1a (ESV)

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.

Interestingly, in each greeting to the churches, Jesus will point out a specific characteristic about himself that is consistent with what John used to describe Jesus in chapter 1 ... for instance:

1. **Ephesus: Him who holds** the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands' (1:13,16)
2. Smyrna: The First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life (1:17-18)
3. Pergamum: Him who has the sharp two-edged sword' (1:16)
4. Thyatira: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass (1:14-15)

5. **Sardis:** He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars (1:4,16)
6. Philadelphia: He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens (1:18)
7. Laodicea: The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of God's creation (1:5)

In Sardis, Jesus is presenting himself as He who has the seven Spirits of God is a reference to The Holy Spirit ... there is not 7 of them, but 7 is the number of completion and so its the idea that Jesus embodies the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah says that the seven fold nature of The Holy Spirit will rests on him

Isaiah 11:1–2 (ESV)

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
2 And 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 the fear of the Lord.

1. The Spirit of the Lord 2. The Spirit of Wisdom 3. The Spirit of Understanding 4. The Spirit of Counsel 5. The Spirit of Might 6. The Spirit of Knowledge 7. The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord

These seven aspects of the Spirit represent the complete and perfect work of the Holy Spirit in guiding, empowering, and revealing God's truth... and they rest upon the Lord in their distinctness and are true of His nature in His oneness with The Holy Spirit.

OK, as we take a look at Sardis, let me give you a little background on it:

Sardis was a wealthy and influential city in Asia Minor, serving as the capital of the ancient Lydian Kingdom. It was known for its prosperity, gold deposits, and is likely the place where coins as currency we first developed.

However, its history was marked by complacency. In 546 BC, the Persians, led by Cyrus the Great, captured Sardis by scaling its seemingly impenetrable cliffs, which were left unguarded due to their overconfidence and negligence. A similar event occurred in 214 BC when Antiochus III's army took the city by exploiting the same negligence... they were not a city that stayed on the alert.

This same negligence and complacency was reflected in the church's spiritual condition as well ... which is why Jesus's call to them will be to WAKE UP!

Let's take a look:

1. Condemnation of Sardis

Revelation 3:1-2

"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

This is the worst place for a church to be ... they are not alive!

They have a "reputation" of being alive ... they have a building, they have an audience, they have a community ... they have programs... they have what looks like a church from the outside looking in ... but Jesus isn't looking from the outside in ... he's looking from the inside out ... and from Jesus's perspective... they're dead!

Like the illustration of the stars that I mentioned earlier, they had the appearance of a lively star... but time would soon reveal it's dead... this was a church that was dead!

Let me give you **6 characteristics of a dead church**:

1. The Word of God is not the sole source of authority

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2. Jesus is not the central figure of the church

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

3. Sin is not confronted

1 Corinthians 5:6-7

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

4. Influenced by culture over truth

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

5. Holy living is not pursued

1 Peter 1:15-16

But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

6. The "crucified life" is not pursued.

Galatians 2:20

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Churches and denominations over the years that at one time housed pulpits that sounded the clear message of the gospel have been replaced with culturally driven liturgy and motivational speakers that offer the same content as a "Ted Talk" ... how to be happy and healthy, not holy!

Look at the Methodist, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, Episcopalians, RCA, Congregational and many of the mainline churches that have allowed the outside influences, values, principles and even pagan practices of the culture into their assembly... causing a mass exodus of genuine believers from their midst... leaving behind only unbelievers that remained "committed to church" but "committed to Christ"! (Not every church) ... the central preaching on the biblical person of Christ is becoming less and less popular in our culture!

In his book, Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church Michael Horton asks the question:

"What would things look like if Satan really took control of a city? Over half a century ago, Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse offered his own scenario in his weekly sermon that was also broadcast nationwide on CBS radio. Barnhouse speculated that if Satan took over Philadelphia, all of the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say, "Yes, sir" and "No ma'am," and the churches would be full every Sunday...where Christ is not preached."

Those churches would have a reputation of being alive... but, like Sardis would be dead!

The church must uphold its commitment to Jesus, as portrayed in the scriptures and to the 66 books that comprise God's Word.

We must **remain committed to**:

1. Inspiration of Scripture ... breathed out by God
2. The Inerrancy of Scripture ... that it is incapable of error in original writings
3. The Sufficiency of Scripture ... that it addresses all we need to know about God, ourselves and the world around us that pertains to to eternity.

Let's take a look at:

2. The Command

Revelation 3:2-4

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.

Wake up!! Define Reality!!! Don't do spiritually what Sardis was guilty of doing in the past, being complacent and negligent ... wake up!

Define Reality ... they were living in denial about their spiritual condition and they didn't realize that some were dead... others were on life support! They were in a "church" but they weren't "in Christ" ...

Which is why Jesus didn't find their "works complete in the sight of God" ... because the only work that is complete in the sight of God is the work of Christ applied to one's life!

The doctrine is called "imputation" ... where the righteousness of Christ is "applied" to our lives ... His work on the cross is applied to us and it's THAT work that is the only work brings us into the family of God! Not being in a church ... but being in Christ ... and if you've not experienced that ... today is the day to do it!

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.

3. The Counsel

Revelation 3:5-6

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.'

The one who "conquers" ... the one who wakes up and comes to Christ will be:

1. Clothed in White Garments:

The white garments signify purity and holiness ... something that is only achieved by the work of Christ! What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus!

2. I will never blot his name out of the book of Life

This speaks of the security that we have in Christ! This is not a "threat" of blotting out their name but a promise to NEVER blot out their name! That He who began a good work in us WILL complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ! (Phil 1:6)

All that the Father gives me will come to me and I will raise him up! John 6

Romans 8:30 (ESV)

30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

3. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels

I love this, what Jesus is saying is not only will your name NOT be blotted out of the book of life, but on the contrary, I will confess it to my Father! He will affirm, this is my son, this is my daughter, this is who I died for, this is who I was raised for ...

This is in keeping with the promise Jesus made in:

Matthew 10:32 (ESV)

32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,

And so Jesus's message to the church at Sardis includes 3 audiences with 3 goals...

1. Those who were "spiritually dead" ... the charge that they should stop playing church and heed Christ's warning of impending judgement ...

2. That the indifferent believers would wake up before it was too late to save their church

3. To the faithful few, they could take comfort in the knowledge that their salvation was eternally secure.

Let's Pray