

A Church Funeral

Revelation 3:1-6

(preached Pine Grove 12/11/16; Sunday AM)

Introduction

Take your Bibles out and turn with me to the book of Revelation..

Revelation, chapter 3, verse 1...

Today, we are going to examine the 5th of 7 churches that Jesus wrote a letter to in 90-95 AD...

The church at Sardis...

Let's read this short letter and then go back and look at its meaning and application to us a little closer...

Rev 3:1-6...

3 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, [a]but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember [b]what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a

thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 But you have a few [c]people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and 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.'

Let us pray.

One day a fox noticed a crow fly out of window with a piece of cheese in its beak..

The fox followed the bird with his eyes until it landed on the branch of a nearby tree..

The fox moved under the branch and called up to the crow...

“Mr. Crow, you are looking mighty fine today.

Your feathers are so dark and shiny, and your flight is as graceful as any bird I have ever seen.”

So, I am only guessing that your voice is as beautiful as well..

Will you please let out a big “caw” just to satisfy my ears.”

The crow expanded his chest and let out a huge caw, allowing the cheese to fall from his mouth to the fox below..

The fox grabbed the cheese and said to the crow, “my that was great, almost as great as this piece of cheese.”

Let me pay you pay it by giving you a piece of advice...

Be careful of flattering words; you may lose more than your cheese next time.”

That story is the creation of a man named Aesop, who is the author of many stories like this known as Aesop’s fables...

You probably heard many of them in school as they are often short stories with a moral at the end..

Aesop lived from 620 - 564 BC, and he lived in Sardis...

At the time of Aesop, Sardis was a bustling town of the Lydian Empire...

Not much is known about Aesop, but his stories often found their inspiration from events in Sardis..

Now Sardis eventually became part of the Greek and then Roman Empire...

But the city was devastated by an earthquake in 17 AD...

The Romans helped rebuild the city, and eventually a church sprang up there, most likely due to the preaching of Paul in Ephesus in the mid 50s..

However, by the time that John writes the book of Revelation in 90 AD, Sardis was only a shadow of its former self...

Today, there are ruins in Sardis, but not much else..

You can see the ruins of the former temple of Artemis, who was a Greek goddess worshipped by the people in Sardis...

And you can see the remains of a Christian church that was built right beside the temple to Artmeis...

Unfortunately, the church at Sardis that began in 50 AD was equally in ruin when Jesus wrote to them in 90-95 AD...

It was even beyond ruin to the point that Jesus gave the worst description he could give to any church at the end of verse 1...

The church at Sardis was dead.

We don't know the reason for its downfall, but judging by the churches around it...

It had probably given in to the evil culture around it, and be victimized by the false teachers that were all over the region..

Though we don't know the details, the killer of all churches is unrepentant sin among the members and leadership..

It is false teaching that is allowed to go on unchecked and uncorrected...

Churches simply die because the people in them give in to their flesh and loved the world more than they love the church...

Churches sometimes die because they never were made up of true believers but merely unsaved people who sat on pews for years and years....

And Sardis had experienced that...

We have seen a declining pattern in the 3rd, 4th, and now 5th churches that Jesus wrote...

Pergamum compromised and allowed false teaching to occur in its midst...

Thyatira submitted to a false woman teacher and leader...

And now Sardis is the final stop on the road to compromise...

It is dead...

And so Jesus comes to this church in these verses with a clear message...

You are dead Sardis, but in the midst of deadness, Jesus is going to give a recipe for life...

Before he issues a final warning...

Our job is to listen to this letter, see where our church and our lives fit within this letter and respond appropriately....

So, let's look at Sardis this morning in 3 sections...

I. A Death Sentence (1)

II. A Life Sentence (2-3a)

III. A Final Sentence (3b-6)

Let's begin back in verse 1 with....

I. A Death Sentence (1)

***“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:
He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven
stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a
name that you are alive, [a]but you are dead.***

We are now at our fifth letter from Jesus to the churches and it begins like the previous 4 four letters...

Jesus gives his words to a messenger for the church at Sardis, who was to take Jesus' words to the church at Sardis..

Now as Jesus comes to the church as Sardis, he comes as One holding the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars...

The 7 Spirits of God is simply the entire ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world...

The number 7 simply represents completeness and Jesus sends the Spirit to do His Work in the world, much like the Father sent the Son to do His work in the world...

And the picture may be of the church at Sardis lacking the ministry of the Holy Spirit...

And the only way to lack the Holy Spirit in a church is to lack true Christians in a church because every believer has the gift of the Spirit...

So maybe comes to them having the seven Spirits of God to remind them of the lack true believers in their church and therefore the lack of the Holy Spirit in the church...

Regardless of he picture, Jesus comes bearing the Spirit of God to a church that clearly lacks the ministry of the Spirit...

And when he comes, we see some familiar words...

“I know your deeds....”

We have talked about this this almost weekly, but when Jesus comes to a church, it is not to see what is going on...

Because Jesus clearly knows what he needs to know already, and he knew the deeds of the church of Sardis...

But here is where this letter differs from all the other letters...

Because none of the deeds of the church at Sardis were commendable...

In fact, Jesus offers no pat on the back to the church at Sardis for their faith of perseverance or defense of his name...

He simply I know your deeds, and then Jesus adds...

I also know your reputation....

The church at Sardis must have had a good reputation in the world....

In fact, the world was saying that the church at Sardis was alive...

They were saying that if any church had it going on, it was the church at Sardis...

The church at Sardis would have been in the news for all the good things that were happening there...

But even if the world loves you, only Jesus' view of you really matters...

And Jesus had a clear view of the church at Sardis...

It was dead.

It was a spiritual disaster and wasteland..

It was a desert of spiritual dryness...

Now, here is the lesson for us...

Looks on the outside are deceiving, right?

The Pharisees looked religious and alive, but Jesus said they were full of dead men's bones...

And some churches can look very much alive, but dead as door nails spiritually...

The church at Sardis was as shiny as a new penny, but their worth was much less than a penny...

Because they were dead to Christ...

How does this happen in a church, you may ask...

It happens when traditions overshadow Jesus Christ as the driving force in a church...

It happens when the fellowship with others matters more than fellowship with Christ...

It happens when church is a family reunion and social club and something to do on a Sunday rather than an opportunity to learn, hear, and obey the Word of God.

IT happens when the Bible is replaced by the bylaws,
and the church operates on the wisdom of man and not
the wisdom of God...

It happens when the people in the pews are not
concerned about their eternal destiny and more
concerned about who sees them at church...

It happens when dead people hear the gospel but reject it
for worldly living...

Churches are dead because the people in them are dead,
and have no interest in coming to life...

The church at Sardis was dead due to years of spiritual
decline and attitudes that didn't care about the things of
God...

There are dead churches everywhere today, where dead
people go and sing dead songs and listen to dead
sermons by dead preachers who can't find the Bible with
two hands and a flashlight...

And seeing such tragedy simply leads Jesus to day....

Sardis, you are dead...

I can think of nothing worse to hear spoken about a
church than that...

Yet on the heels of this death sentence, Jesus issues a life sentence as well....

II. A Life Sentence (2-3a)

Let's read verse 2 and the first part of verse 3 again...

2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember [b]what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.

In February of 2014, a man named Walter Williams passed away in his home in Lexington Mississippi...

The coroner came to the home and declared him dead, and a death certificate was signed...

The family called the funeral home, who came to move the body to the mortuary...

The only problem...

Walter Williams wasn't dead...

As the funeral home staff prepared to embalm him, Williams woke up with a scream and sent the funeral home staff running...

They called 911 and Williams was transported to the hospital, where he spent one night before being sent back home less than 48 hours after being declared dead...

Though these stories are rare, they have occurred as people has woken up in funeral homes, morgues and even at their own funeral service..

So can a near dead church come back to life?

Well, sure it can, and in verses 2-3, Jesus gives a recipe for life from the edge of death for a church...

The recipe in Sardis was quite simple...

Look at verse 2...

The first requirement is the WAKE UP....

The clear instruction is this...

A church needs to get its head out of sand and arise from its slumber and see the seriousness of who they are in the world...

The church is God's means for communicating the gospel to the world...

It is past time for churches to stop being social clubs and wake up their people to the matter of life or death that rests upon the church...

And the church's need to wake up and stop sleeping on the job..

And then Jesus says to simply strengthen the things that remain...

Evidently, Sardis had not always been a dead church...

They had been a church that was alive, but now there was just a pulse...

There were just a couple of things that they were doing right..

And Jesus adds step two of a recipe back to life...

Find what you do well church and concentrate on that...

Stop trying to do everything and start doing what you are good at that pleases the Lord...

So many churches try to be all things to all people...

The church is to be a place where truth is preached and people are loved....

Do those well and a dead church can find life...

And final step in the way back to life is found in the first part of verse 3...

Jesus simply tells the church to remember what they had received and heard, to keep it, and to repent...

Which is simply a call for the church to remember the Word of God which they had received and heard most likely from Paul and his friends...

And not only to remember it, but to keep it, and repent of what they had done to get them off track...

This is yet another reminder from the word of God that it is not enough to receive the Word of God, but that you must keep and obey what you hear....

Many receive the Word of God but few keep it....

A sure way to die as a church or as a person is to hear the word of God but refuse to obey it...

Most of the people at the church at Sardis had become hearers only and no doers and the result is a dead church...

So, Jesus says remember what you received and keep it and repent of not keeping it in the past...

So, there's a sentence to life back from death..

Wake up.

Do the things that you do good even better..

Remember the Word you received and start obeying it,
and live a life of repentance...

Any church that begins to do those things will rise from
its death bed back to life...

So, we have seen the death sentence...

The life sentence...

And now we see Jesus' final sentences to the church at
Sardis....

III. A Final Sentence (3b-6)

Jesus final words to the church at Sardis begin with a clear warning...

Look at the last half of verse 3...

Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

As we have seen over and over in these letters to the churches, Jesus takes the purity of his church seriously...

Though he always allows time to repent...

Even in a dead church, Jesus gives them opportunity to turn from their wickedness and turn to Him....

But if they refuse to wake up and refuse to remember and obey the Word, Jesus vows that he will come to them...

When they are least expecting him, and it will not be a friendly visit ..

Just like dead branches need to be cut from healthy trees, dead churches need to be cut from the living body of Christ...

Jesus did give his life for the church to watch them die, so he will come and cut out the splinter before it infects the whole body...

Churches die and they wither up because Jesus comes and cuts off their life support that comes from Him...

And if Sardis didn't repent, their days were numbered and were coming soon...

But then in verse 4, we find a final few encouraging sentences from our Lord...

4 But you have a few [c]people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and 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.'

Just like the previous 4 letters, Jesus ends letter #5 with a word of encouragement.

So, in verse 4 we get what many see as the only good news of this letter, and that is the fact that not every one in the church at Sardis was dead...

There is always those even in the deadest of churches who are alive and carrying the truth to the next generation..

In Sardis, it was very few who still were wearing clothes that had not been stained by the sins of those in the church around them...

As always, Jesus calls them overcomes, speaking to the fact that they hold fast and overcome much to much opposition to their faithfulness and loyalty to Christ..

These were the people who were listening to the Word and obeying it...

These were the people who were the respirator for the entire church to keep it breathing when it had already died...

For them, Jesus has nothing but encouragement...

He tells them since they had kept their clothes clean, he would give them a white garment that is sin, and therefore, stain proof....

In eternity, sin can't stain us because sin isn't there...

No need for Clorox in heaven because even the dirt is clean...

Not only will this faithful remnant get a white garment, their name is written in permanent marker in the book of life...

And on top of that, the overcomer's name is confessed by Christ to the Father..

Can you imagine the sound of Jesus saying your name before the Father in heaven?

Do you understand the promise of the gospel?

If you confess the name of Christ in this world, He will confess your name to God the Father in the world to come...

What a promise to hold on to if you are a faithful follower of Christ today!

One of my favorite memories of kindergarten was roll call....

The teacher would gather us all around in a circle and she could clearly see who was there and who wasn't there...

There were only 15 or so of us...

But she would pull out that black teacher roll book, and she would call out our names...

My name was right after Julie Lominick and right before Ty Patterson...

And we always had the choice of saying 'here' or 'present' and I always said PRESENT to be different...

And though we did it everyday, there was just something about hearing your name and knowing you were there and see Mrs. Suber smile at you..

Can imagine Jesus going down the lamb's book of life and finding you name and calling it out to His Father?

Now look, just like Mrs. Suber, Jesus knows you belong there...

The Father knows you belong there...

So why confess your name?

It is simply for our benefit and blessing...

Salvation gives us new clothes, a name written in permanent marker in the roll book of heaven...

And the promise of Jesus calling our name out to the Father...

How can you possibly not come alive with such a promise this morning?

How can prefer to be dead in your sins rather than alive to Christ...

How can you choose to wear dirty clothes stained by your sinful life and refuse the new wardrobe that Christ offers?

Today is the day to confess Jesus as Lord and repent of your sins...

Today is the day to confess salvation in Jesus name, and secure the promise of your name being spoken in heaven...

Conclusion

Look, Sardis was a dead church...

No life.

No joy.

No spiritual interest...

Yet no one could see it from the outside...

And look, Bud Moss was a dead man...

No life, even though I looked like I was full of it....

No joy, even though I laughed and joked around all the time..

No spiritual interest, even though I thought I knew it all.

Thank God that he showed me my deception and saved me...

Because images are deceiving...

Some of you in here have fooled a lot of people for a long time...

Like Sardis, you have a name that suggests you are alive...

You have a reputation in the community that you are a good Christian man or woman, but what would Jesus say about you this morning?

Would he call you dead or alive?

And do you even care?

I pray that you care, because all the world can say that you are alive and saved and living right...

But if Jesus sees you as dead, his view is the only one that counts...

The church at Sardis was dead but on life support, awaiting Jesus to come and pull the plug...

The same is true of you this morning if you are alive to Christ...

You may look healthy, but you are simply on life support..

And that life line is the mighty hand of God that holds you up and fills your lungs with air and keeps that heart beating in your chest...

I would say this to scare you, but you don't possess a living will..

You don't hold the authority to keep your life support turned on or off...

God alone possesses that power...

And since the power is still on and you still have opportunity, confess Jesus as Lord this morning and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and the word of God says that you can be saved...

Please dont just hear the word of God this morning...

Keep the Word of God and obey it and repent and trust in Christ alone...

Let go of your sins and believe that Christ has forgiven them...

Sardis had a death sentence, and so do you if you wont repent and trust fully in Jesus Christ...

Let us pray..