

DEAD CHURCHES TELL BAD TALES

Revelation 3:1-6

Christ's Message To The Church Of Sardis

I. Christ Is The Head And The Heart Of The Church (1a)

"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.

II. Christlessness Is The Death And The Dearth Of The Church (1b)

¹⁶ "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

A. Reputation: _____ Gives The Appearance Of Life

1. A Dying Church Focuses On External Good Deeds, Not Internal Spiritual Transformation
2. A Dying Church Is Alive To The World, But Dead Towards The Lord
 - The Word of God is not the authority
 - Christ is a mere historical figure or example and not Lord
 - God is not worshipped, but a church's own history, reputation or name is worshipped

B. Reality: Forsaking The _____ And Christ Gives The Stench Of Death

III. Christ's Glory And Gospel Is The Pulse Of The Church (2-4)

A. Revival – Resuscitation Of A Dying Church (2)

1. _____ Up – *"wake up"* (1 Pet 2:4-5; 2 Cor 6:16; Gal 2:19-20)
2. _____ What Remains – *"and strengthen what remains and is about to die"*
3. _____ The Focus Of The Church's Ministry – *"for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God."*

B. Repentance – Turn Around Or Die (3-4)

1. Remember To _____ God's Word Or Be Judged (3)
³Remember, 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.
2. Build Around The _____ Who Remain Righteous In Christ (4)
⁴Yet 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.

IV. Heaven's Reward Is Our Pursuit, Not Earthly Acceptance (5-6)

⁵The 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. ⁶He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

A. A Clothing Of Righteousness Is The Celebratory Reward (5a)

B. A Permanent Entry Is The Ultimate Assurance (5b)

C. An Honorable Mention Is The Highest Honor (6)

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1. Wake Up – *"wake up"* (1 Pet 2:4-5; 2 Cor 6:16; Gal 2:19-20)
2. Strengthen What Remains – *"and strengthen what remains and is about to die"*
3. Evaluate The Focus Of The Church's Ministry – *"for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God."*

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Christ's Message To The Church Of Sardis

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Introduction:

1. IE/ David Jeremiah tells the story of a minister known for doing eccentric things. One Sunday morning, he told the church that he believed the church was dead. People muttered in the pews before he said "Come back tonight, I'm going to preach the funeral service of the church. The members were shocked, but they had their largest attended evening service in years

In front of the pew was a casket and the people were in a state of shock as they listened to the pastor deliver a eulogy. The Pastor said "Some of you may not agree with me that this church is dead. So that you may be convinced, I am going to ask you to view the remains. I want you to file by the casket, one by one, and see who is dead."

As each person walked by, they saw a mirror at the bottom of the casket. It was obvious that they saw themselves as the deceased.

2. IE/ Coleridge says in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. **"Corpses man the ship; dead men pull the oars; dead men hoist the sails; dead men steer the vessel."**

- This was the church at Sardis – and may it never be FBC
- **Heed** these words and let's commit to not repeat it

3. Sardis the City

- **Location** – 50 miles southeast of Thyatira, this city was thought to be militarily impregnable because of its location on a mountain surrounded by steep cliffs and had only one narrow avenue of entry through a valley converged by 2 rivers. Sardis was a bi-level city. Part of it was in the valley and another part was built on Mount Tmolus, 1,500 feet high.
- **History** – Sardis use to be the capital of the Lydian Kingdom. Three noted figures in history are from Sardis – Solon, a Greek legislator; Thales, the father of Greek philosophy;

and the famous King Cresus (today, if you are said to be “as rich as Cresus”, then you were a wealthy person). Cresus is said to be the first to cast metal coined money.

Despite its impregnable fortress, Sardis was twice attacked because it was not being watchful and on guard. The Lydian Kingdom fell to the Persians in the 549 BC. The Persian King Cyrus taught their children to use musical instruments instead of weapons. Then the Syrians attacked Sardis in 214 BC later under Antiochus III.

It was completely destroyed a severe **earthquake** in 17 A.D. Emperor Tiberius waived taxes for the citizens of Sardis for 5 years and sent them \$250,000 to help rebuild the city. Coins have been found commemorating Caesar Tiberius’ generosity.

Sardis grew wealthy during the peace provided through the Roman Empire. The greater the prosperity, the greater the immorality and decadence came in the city. The city had peace, prosperity, culture and commerce, but spiritually, they were dead.

- **Religion**

1) Temple of Diana (Artemis) – ruins are still present today. Diana worship brings great wickedness through prostitution and orgies.

- Andrew Tate writes: “Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysos were practiced at the festivals held in her honor. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions; and when we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex.”¹

2) There was also tremendous emperor worship as well.

- **Commerce** – The Pactolus river, that ran through the city, contained a lot of gold that made the city wealthy. Sardis was a center of trade and commerce. It was the hub in the middle of the trade routes in the Middle East.

I. Christ Is The Head And The Heart Of The Church (1a)

^{1a} “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.

- Christ Possesses The Seven Spirits Of God

Q: What would the 7 Spirits refer to? What is significant about the number 7?

- the Holy Spirit is in view here
- 7 spirits indicates the work the HS is doing in the 7 churches

¹ Andrew Tate, *The Messages to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*, p. 299, quoted by Walvoord in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 79.

- it is also an allusion to the 7-fold ministry of the HS in **Isaiah 11:2-5** (wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear, righteousness)
- 7 is also a number of completeness
- Rev 4:5 – 7 Spirits of God were 7 burning lamps (menorah) of Zechariah 4:1-10

Q: What is the significance of the Holy Spirit in addressing a spiritually dead church?

- Christ Possesses The Seven Stars

Q: Who or what is the 7 stars?

- perhaps the pastors of the 7 churches

Q: What does this imply about the role of the pastor before our Lord Jesus Christ?

- pastors are accountable – even for the false teaching and spiritual deadness in the church

II. Christlessness Is The Death And The Dearth Of The Church (1b)

^{1b} “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

A. Reputation: Activity Gives The Appearance Of Life

1. A Dying Church Focuses On External Good Deeds, Not Internal Spiritual Transformation

- more form than function
- looking at numbers and not commitment
- management, not ministry

Q: What external activities can consume a church to the point where they grow cold to spiritual things?

- Politics, social concerns, socials for the sake of socials alone – all good things

Q: How can a church be involved in social concerns without losing its spiritual pulse beat?

2. A Dying Church Is Alive To The World, But Dead Towards The Lord

Q: What are the signs of a dead church?

a. The Word of God is not the authority

Q: What replaces the authority of God’s Word?

- relativism, pluralism, personal opinion, popular polls, democratic church government, leadership that thinks more highly of its position than God’s sovereignty

- listening to the Bible, but not living the Bible

b. Christ is a mere historical figure or example and not Lord

Q: How can a church or denomination move from faithful to faithless before the Lordship of Christ?

c. God is not worshipped, but a church's own history, reputation or name is worshipped

- "The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero... And when any internal or external force tried to change the past, they responded with anger and resolution: "We will die before we change." And they did." *Rainer, Thom S.. Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive (p. 18). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.*

B. Reality: Forsaking The Gospel And Christ Gives The Stench Of Death

III. Christ's Glory And Gospel Is The Pulse Of The Church (2-4)

A. Revival – Resuscitation Of A Dying Church (2)

²*Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.*

1. Wake Up – "wake up"

- "wake up" = *gregoreo* = lit. "wake up"
 - Jesus returned from praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and found the disciples asleep and asked them: "Could you not watch (stay awake) with me for one hour?"
- God wants a **LIVING & ACTIVE CHURCH**

a. Each Member Is An Active Priest(ess)

1 Peter 2:4-5 ⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

b. God Actively Lives In And Among Us

2 Corinthians 6:16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among

them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

c. To Live For God Is To Be Crucified With Christ

Galatians 2:19-20 ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I 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.

2. Strengthen What Remains – “and strengthen what remains and is about to die”

- “strengthen” = to strengthen, make stable, firm
 - stir viscous cream until it thickens
 - aorist imperative – strengthen now, before it’s too late
- As a chain is only as strong as it’s weakest link, the church is only as strong as it’s weakest member.
- If you’re struggling or dying spiritually, seek that small remnant of spiritual desire and strengthen yourself
- As a spiritually struggling individual can be revitalized, a dead church can come back to life.
 - Sometime it may mean pulling out of liberal denomination
 - E.g. Glide Memorial pastors are being replaced by the United Methodist Church because of their extreme liberalism
 - One of our missionaries had to leave the church their family had been serving at because the leadership has drifted from the objective truth of God’s Word
- Christ knows your weak point: “I have not found your works perfect before God”
- **Identify our weak point and strengthen up**

1. Watch Out For Attacks On Your Weaknesses

- watch your weaknesses

Q: Name a historical, biblical or literary character that fell because of his weakness?

- Macbeth – ambition, Marc Antony – lust
- Samson – lust, Saul – pride, Elijah – fear
- Your lust, your pride, your fear can be the point of attack for the devil and can lead to your downfall

2. Watch Out For Your Strong Points Turning Into Points Of Weakness

- ie/ ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, tells a story about the founding of Sardis
- mythical founder, Meles, was given the power to make the acropolis impregnable by carrying around a lion all around to different points of its fortification
 - carrying a lion was quite heavy
 - when he got to the south wall of the city and saw how it would be too steep for anyone to scale 1500 feet of cliffs, he said "Nobody can get up the mountain to attack here."
 - Meles did not carry the lion up the wall seeing it as safe

1) Several years later, Croesus, the Lydian king was being attacked by Cyrus, the Persian king. Croesus withdrew to the mountain fortress believing that Persia could not penetrate the cliffs to attack the city. The Persians were driven back and lost many soldiers. Cyrus offered a reward to the first soldier who would climb the side of the mountain and scale the walls. One of the Persian guards watched a Lydian soldier on top of the wall drop his helmet. It clattered like a ball in a Pachinko pinball machine.

The Persian guard watched the Lydian soldier climb down this tricky cliff to retrieve his helmet and then climbed back up. He correctly analyzed that if the Lydian could scale up the mountain, so could the Persians. That night, the Persians followed that route and attacked the city at its strongest point.

2) 300 years later, Antiochus III, the Syrian king attacked Sardis by seeing a flock of birds sitting on top of those walls. His reasoning was that if the birds were present, then the guards must not be present. The Syrians scaled the high cliffs and toppled the city at their strong point.

- We must also guard areas we think we're strong in

Q: What are FBC's strengths and how could they be penetrated by the enemy?

- Bible teaching becomes scholastic, and not personal
- Programs become more about fun and sports than the Gospel
- More concerned about physical food than spiritual food
- Become so concerned about our own membership that we don't reach out and minister to the world around us
- We become comfortable and secure in our history of peacefulness that inner turmoil brews

3. Evaluate The Focus Of The Church's Ministry – *"for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God."*

- So how can you see what your life is worth
Or where your value lies?
You can never see through the eyes of man

You must look at your life

Look at your life through Heaven's eyes

- "Through Heaven's Eyes" (Brian Stokes Mitchell, "The Prince of Egypt")

- FBC is not measured by Yelp reviews, popularity polls or Facebook likes
- FBC is measured by God through His measuring stick the Bible

B. Repentance – Turn Around Or Die (3-4)

1. Remember To Obey God's Word Or Be Judged (3)

³Remember, 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.

- "remember" – present tense – continual and progressive action
 - keep on remembering
 - Remember how God has blessed us for teaching God's Word and preaching the Gospel
 - Simple question: **Do you remember Christ in Church?**
- "have received" – perfect tense – that which you received in the past that has continuous effects to the present time
- "heard" – what you previously learned
 - Sardis get influenced by the legalism that entrapped the Galatians
 - get back to what God has taught
 - Resist Liberalism and the Health & Wealth Gospel
 - new teachings excited old denominations that attacked the authority of God's Word, deity of Christ and grace of salvation
 - under the guise of intellectualism and scholasticism
 - ie/ JEPD
- "keep it"
 - keep on obeying
 - like holding on in a bobsled, stay secure in Christ and faithful to Christ
- "repent"
 - Turn from our spiritual lethargy

2. Build Around The Few Who Remain Righteous In Christ (4)

⁴Yet 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.

- few = *oligos* = slight, small – just a handful of faithful people
- God doesn't call us to be a mega-church. PTL for them, but that's not every church.
- Focus on who we have

- Sardis had a few names that remained righteous
- “Not soiled their garments” – impure, stained with sin, polluted

Isaiah 64:6 “all our righteousness (works) are as filthy rags”
 - even good works are considered dirty if done by dirty people

IV. Heaven’s Reward Is Our Pursuit, Not Earthly Acceptance (5-6)

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- There are churches who build around being accepted by the world and the lost
- They will do good in the community – but they don’t preach Christ, the Gospel or focus on eternity

A. A Clothing Of Righteousness Is The Celebratory Reward (5a)

- Walk in white – cf. **Rev 19:8, 7:14**

Revelation 19:7-8 ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—

Revelation 7:14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- Robes were festive (celebration) – wear white to a festival
- White robes – symbolized victors – athletes and war heroes wore white robes
- White – purity
- White - glory

B. A Permanent Entry Is The Ultimate Assurance (5b)

- name can never be erased
- eternal security
- ie/ Roman Catholic church believes that it can blot a person’s name out of the Book of Life.
 - Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic church to eternal damnation.
 - Savonarola was excommunicated by the RC church which told him “I separate you from the church militant and from the church triumphant.” Savonarola replied “From the church militant, yes; but from the church triumphant, never! It is not within your power to do this!”

C. An Honorable Mention Is The Highest Honor (6)

Conclusion:

1. A spiritually dying church/fellowship/individual emphasizes external good works, not spiritual growth.
2. A spiritually dying church/fellowship/individual becomes content with the way things are and doesn't seek to grow in new areas or reach out to others.
3. A relationship with and dependence upon The Holy Spirit is essential to spiritual vibrancy.



<http://gjcoc.us/revelation-03-01-01-autopsy-on-a-dead-church-member-powerpoint-audio/>

By Ralph Price

- Causes of Death
 - Starvation – [1 Peter 2:2](#); [Hebrews 5:12-14](#); [Matthew 5:6](#)
 - Spiritual Diabetes – [Isaiah 30:9-10](#); [Jeremiah 6:14](#); [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#)
 - Sclerosis of the Giver – [2 Corinthians 9:7](#); [Luke 12:19-20](#)
 - Sunday Sickness – [John 4:23-24](#); [Hebrews 10:24-25](#)
- Big Head – [Proverbs 16:18](#); [1 Corinthians 10:12](#); [Proverbs 21:24](#); [1 Timothy 3:6](#)
- Busybody – [1 Peter 4:15](#); [1 Timothy 5:13](#)
- Big Mouth – [James 1:26](#); [James 3:6-8](#); [Proverbs 10:19](#); [Proverbs 17:28](#)
- Stiff-Knecked – [Acts 7:51](#); [2 Chronicles 30:8](#)
- Always Looking Back – [Luke 9:62](#)
- Too Busy – [Matthew 6:24](#); [Matthew 6:33](#); [Matthew 10:37-39](#)
- Patting Himself on the Back – [Luke 17:10](#); [Matthew 6:3-4](#)
- Finger Pointing – [Matthew 7:3-5](#); [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)
- No Backbone – [2 Timothy 1:6-7](#); [2 Timothy 4:1-2](#)
- Straddling the Fence – [James 3:9-12](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#)
- Sitting in the Pew – [Proverbs 22:13](#); [James 2:18](#); [Titus 2:14](#)
- Full of Envy – [Proverbs 14:30](#); [Galatians 5:26](#); [Proverbs 23:17](#)
- Can't Bend the Knee – [Ephesians 3:14](#); [Romans 14:11](#)
- Won't Spread the Gospel – [Romans 10:14-15](#); [Matthew 10:32-33](#)

Discussion:

1. Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. When a relationship dies, how do you revive it (ie/ broken friendship, making up after breaking up, remarrying one you divorced, etc.)? What similar principles repair our relationship with Christ?
2. How can you recognize if you are spiritually dying or growing?
3. What are your weak points that you have to continually pay attention to in order to ward off spiritual attack?
4. What are the keys for personal and church revival?
5. How can you become more intimate and dependent upon the Holy Spirit in your every day life?
6. Which of the 5 commandments/challenges must you apply more in your life?