

REVELATION – SERMON 15

THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING DEAD

Revelation 3:1-2,4

INTRODUCTION

- While human doctors sometimes misdiagnose, the Great Physician, the Lord Jesus Christ, always gets His diagnosis right.
- In His letters to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus is in essence giving a spiritual diagnosis of each church.
- With some of these churches, there is a world of difference between how they saw themselves, and how the Lord saw them.
- The church in Sardis had a reputation as being a fine example of a Christian community, yet in reality they were lifeless professors of religion.
- Sadly this is the precise situation of multitudes of churches all over the world today.
- Sardis lay about 50km south-east of Thyatira on a major highway to Mesopotamia; It had formerly been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia.
- The dyeing of wool was invented at Sardis; gold and silver were mined there and the first gold and silver coins were minted at Sardis.
- The main religion in the city was the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana)
- Sardis sat at the top of a high plateau, and her perceived impregnability led to a complacency among the people which brought about their downfall.
- Cyrus the Persian captured it about 549 BC, by following a secret path up a cliff. Antiochus invaded the city in the same way about 218 BC.
- When it became a Roman city, it was still wealthy and powerful, but gradually declined so that when this letter was written, it was a shadow of its former splendour.
- The church had become like the city – alive in name only.
- It doesn't appear that they were suffering persecution, or that they were poor and destitute, and this peace and prosperity added to their deplorable spiritual state.

- The church in Sardis might well be called a “congregation of the dead” (cf. Proverbs 21:16)
- There is no word of commendation to this church, as with the Laodiceans.

Consider the Lord’s threefold diagnosis of this “church of the living dead”:

I. A DEAD CHURCH (1)

A. Christ’s declaration of divine authority

1. He hath the seven Spirits of God (cf. Revelation 1:4)
 - a. There is only one Holy Spirit
 - b. His seven-fold ministry is described in Isaiah 11:2
 - c. Christ shows His divine prerogative to send the life-giving Spirit to whom He will (John 15:26-27; 16:7,13-14)
 - d. It was the want of this Spirit of life in the hearts of these professing Christians that left them spiritually dead (James 2:26)
2. He hath the seven stars (Revelation 1:16,20; 2:1)
 - a. This shows His power over the church
 - b. It shows His keen interest in the welfare of His church
 - c. As the Head of the church, He has the right to judge it

B. A name that thou livest

1. The *name* is a recurring theme in this message (cf. vv.4,5)
2. This means a *reputation*
3. Reputation is what people think you are; reality is what Jesus knows you are
4. Like the scribes and Pharisees, the people in this church were hypocrites, pretending to be something they were not (Matthew 23:27-28)
5. Many use religion to make a name for *themselves* not to exalt the name of Jesus Christ (Genesis 11:4)

C. Thou art dead

1. Many in the church were unregenerate
 - a. All men enter this world “dead in trespasses and sins” and must be quickened by God’s Spirit (Ephesians 2:1)
 - b. It is vitally important for a church to see real evidence of conversion before receiving people into membership
 - c. The problem was here was not the evil they had, but the good thing they lacked (Luke 10:42; 18:22)
2. The characteristics of a dead church:
 - a. Unconscious and unaware
 - b. Inactive
 - c. Voiceless
 - d. No hunger or appetite (Matthew 5:6)
 - e. No growth or fruit (Luke 13:7; Hebrews 5:12)
 - f. Cold (Matthew 24:12)
 - g. May appear beautiful (Matthew 23:27)
 - h. Are well spoken of (Luke 6:26)
 - i. Stink (John 11:39)

II. A DEFICIENT CHURCH (2)

- A. Their dead hearts made their works displeasing to God
 1. “Perfect” means fulfilled or complete – they did not meet God’s approval
 2. The works of the unregenerate are “dead works” (Hebrews 6:1)
 3. The thorny ground hearer brings “no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14)
 4. Works performed to be seen of men, or to keep up a “name” do not impress God (Matthew 23:5,28)
 5. Such works are like “wood, hay, stubble” that have no eternal value (1 Corinthians 3:12-13)
 6. Abundance of activity and busy-ness in a church must not be mistaken for spiritual life and genuine piety (Matthew 7:22-23)

III. A DEFILED CHURCH (4)

- A. While a few had not been defiled, it seems that most in this church had defiled their garments
1. The garments represent the morality of one's conduct, particularly outward behaviour (Revelation 16:15)
 2. This world is full of uncleanness and will stain the garments of those who wallow in its filth (Jude 23)
 3. Unless a sinner comes to Christ to be clothed with His righteousness, he has nothing but filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)
 4. Those with pure and undefiled religion will keep themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27)
 5. Those who fall short of genuine conversion continue further and further into sin (Revelation 22:11)

CONCLUSION

1. The pitiable state of this church is sadly mirrored among those who profess to be Christians today
 - They are "dead while they live" (1 Timothy 5:6)
 - They have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5)
 - They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him (Titus 1:16)
2. True Christianity is not a matter of living a certain lifestyle, or following certain rules, but of becoming a new creature by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:15)
3. Those who are not in union with Christ, abiding in Him, will be taken away and cast into the fire (John 15:2,6)
4. *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."* (Hebrews 4:1)
5. In the world's eyes, "death is final", yet Christ is able to bring the dead to life (John 11:25-26)