

You Are Looking Real Good

A young man was traveling by train to Nashville, Tennessee to seek a job as a news reporter. When the conductor asked for his ticket, he named a newspaper company in Nashville and reminded the conductor that news reporters did not need a ticket. The conductor told him that the editor of that newspaper was riding in the rear of the train. If the editor could identify him as a reporter of the newspaper, he could ride for free. When they arrived, the editor did indeed identify the man as a reporter of the newspaper. The man was surprised. After the conductor left, he asked the editor why he lied for him. The man responded with, "I am not the editor. I am traveling on his pass and I was afraid you were going to give me away." Deception! Neither man was what they appeared to be. They were both phonies.

LOOKING SPIRITUALLY ALIVE. The church in the city of Sardis was phony too! It looked like a spiritual power house. The church looked spiritually healthy to the other churches in Asia Minor. It had a reputation of being alive. The pastor may have been a strong Bible teacher. The church may have had great home Bible studies, a wonderful children's Sunday School, or even a large outreach ministry to the community.

We are not sure, but we know that everyone thought this church was alive, real, and spiritually healthy. But God had a different opinion about this church, He did not think the church was alive or that it had wonderful ministries. He had this to say,

I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but



Ancient City of Sardis



Patmos and The Seven Churches

you are dead. Revelation 3:1 (NASB)

They were a dead church! The other churches were deceived. Sardis was not spiritually alive, growing, healthy, or a model church for anyone else to follow. They were dead!

CITY OF SARDIS. The city of Sardis was surrounded by other significant churches like Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Ephesus. God had only good things to say to the churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna, but not to this church. It was not like Ephesus, Thyatira, or Pergamum. In spite of their problems, they were alive, but Sardis was like a chocolate bar filled with little worms.

The church was located in a famous city. Sardis was famous, since it was once the capital of the Lydian empire. It was built on a cliff that was 1,500 feet (457 meters) above the Valley of Hermus. It once produced gold and silver coins and was a center for the mining of gold and silver. In A.D. 17 a signifi-

cant earthquake destroyed most of the city, and Rome helped rebuild the city.

Today all that remains of this once famous city that had a name are ruins. All that remains are the ruins of the acropolis, the Temple of Artemis, a gymnasium, and the tumuli or burial place of the once proud Lydian kings.

The city was known for its pursuit of eternal youth. They wanted to be young, to be alive, and not be dead. The hot springs which are located about 2 miles (3.2 km) from the city were believed to be the key to youthfulness. This was wrong. It is sad, but we will find out in a few verses that many in the church were deceived, too, and thought the church was alive.

DEAD OR ALIVE? About twenty years ago there was a large church, located in a large city, with a seating capacity for 600 persons, but only six people attended. A group of strong Christian leaders and a pastor started a new church in the area. This new church had grown to about one hundred people and

needed a larger place to meet on Sunday morning. So they asked the six people who were attending this older, large church if they could meet in the church on Sundays in the early afternoon. These six people said, “No, not unless we are included in the leadership of your church.” Those six people wanted to be in control. What a disappointment that was to this new growing church. One church was alive and another was dead. Most of us would agree that the old church was dead.

Some of us would not agree that a church with active ministries, a charismatic pastor and with many people in attendance could be a dead church. One measure of an “alive” church that we use is usually “how many people are coming?” We have been captured by the world’s idea of success. It is how many come. Church leaders make decisions by “how many come.”

We start or drop ministries by how many come. We view success by the response of others. Based on that criteria evangelism should be dropped, since few want to do that and even fewer do. But God has a different standard of success - “being spiritually alive.

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. Revelation 3:2 (NASB)



Columns of the Temple of Artemis

WAKE UP! God warns this church to wake-up. He uses one of five Greek words for “wake-up.” The other four have meanings like: “remaining awake while feeling sleepy,” “to wake-up in the morning,” and “to awake after being asleep.” The word for “wake-up” that the Holy Spirit uses means “to remain awake in order to remain alert.” They did not know the church was in a hospital and about to die.

What should they do? God has the answer.

Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. Revelation 3:3 (NASB)

God says these Christians had “received and heard.” What did they receive and hear? They received and heard the scriptures, but nothing happened. They did not respond to the Word of God. They were dead! They heard the living Word of God, but

nothing happened. A church can have ministries, its pastor can teach, the people can be involved in Bible studies; but my friend, if nothing or almost nothing happens, the people are almost dead.

WHAT IS THE VALUE? What is the value of a church when the people do not care about the spiritual power called prayer that empowers its ministries? The people who do not pray are not really seeking God’s blessing or guidance. When we go it



Ruins of the Temple Artemis



Sardis' Acropolis From Below

alone, the church has become a club where God is the spectator of our activities. What is the value of a church where the people have no real hunger to hear God speak - to listen to God's Word? The people come and hear a "sermonette" and then leave feeling that they have met with God. What is the value of worship when the songs lack God-centered meaning? What is the value of Bible study, home Bible studies and church socials when we ignore the non-Christians who are going to hell? This kind of church has become a social group. It has a passion for self in practice and not for God in reality. They have heard His Word - His command, His wishes, His desires - and did "not keep it."

The compassion of our Lord for the poor, orphans, and widows is also sometimes ignored.

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. Proverbs 14:31 (NASB)

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress . . . James 1:27 (NASB)

This is a responsibility of both the church and individual Christians.

THE FAITHFUL. So God warned the church at Sardis to keep His Word and repent or else trouble would be coming. Otherwise, there is no reason to keep them. God would do this even though there were only a few Christians who were really "alive."

But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. Revelation 3:4 (NASB)

Christians who have a spiritual passion for God are often misunderstood and others often think the persons are extreme. I am sure these Christians were the "odd ones" in this church. In some churches it is okay to want to be a pastor, but it is not okay to hunger and thirst to know the Bible so that one can know God. In some churches it is okay to work hard in ministry, but few want to pray with you that God's will is done. Is your church alive? God is not saying that a person becomes a

Christian by becoming "alive." He is talking about removing His blessing from the church and shutting it down.

CONCLUSION. Sardis reminds me of a pattern I see again and again - historic churches which were once effective and blessed of God are now occupied by a small group of Christians on Sunday mornings. The light is gone. That is a sign of a church that has lost its life. Somewhere along the way the people in the church thought they were alive and they did not wake up and now the church is dead.

An almost dead church still has some life. God works on each one of us individually until we become Christians. Then He expects us to take action. It is easy in an almost dead church to want to give up. But He calls us to action. If you have read this study and understand it, then God is calling you to act. If you do, He has a promise for you. He tried to encourage the Christians in Sardis with these words,

He who overcomes shall 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Revelation 3:5-6 (NASB)

The one who overcomes is one who believes in Jesus (1 John 5:5). The people in the church in Sardis who did not respond to God's warning were not "alive." That is the implication of this promise. Christians respond. Jesus wants our deeds to be complete! He wants our deeds to match the new life we have in Jesus.