

Revelation 3:1-6 | The Church That Was Deadβ

The church in Sardis is peculiar in that its condition mirrored that of the city of Sardis

- Sardis was once a vibrant, confident, full of life city
- It had a glorious past and reputation
- But its time had passed
- It was in decline; other cities had usurped its place in trade and strategic import
- It had suffered key military defeats that precipitated its fall
- But it was trying to cling to its former glory—living off a persona formed long ago
- ... **it had a name—a reputation—for being alive, but it was dead...**

This, Jesus says, was that same situation with the church in the city

- ... **it had a name—a reputation—for being alive, but it was dead...**

Why or how does a church die?

- The reasons, of course, are not the same as for the City of Sardis
- Those had to do with trade, strategy, military exploits, etc
- A church dies for one reason only:
 - **It ceases to be about Jesus (specifically; radically; unswervingly)**
 - **Christ is our life (in Him is life)**

When a church ceases to be about Jesus, then people can exist within the church without Jesus (without spiritual life)

- A church is dead because its members are dead (i.e. Not born again)
 - The church is its people
- **If Jesus stops being the main point then people are not compelled to come to Him for life and salvation**

Jesus said that the church would often be this way

- **Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43** (The parable of the tares and the wheat)
 - It isn't that the situation is merely innocuous or passive—**there is an enemy**
 - It isn't merely that there will be people present who are not born again—but also some who are plants (maybe agents?) of the enemy (perhaps unwittingly)
 - The fearful thing is that the two will sometimes be hard to distinguish (until **fruit**; v. 29)

2 Corinthians 13:5^a (NASB)

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!

At the church in Sardis there was a lack of self-awareness

- They did not know they were dead
- Easy to do when Jesus is not the main point and the one to be worshipped and obeyed
- **Matthew 7:13-27**
 - There are some who are playing Christian—playing church
 - Again, they look the part (like the tares)
 - Again, the difference is true obedience
 - Verse 21 = "**he who does the will of my Father in heaven**"
 - Verse 24 = "**everyone who hears these words of mine and acts upon them**"

Looking for signs of life... are you:

- Making Jesus the King?
- Longing to glorify Jesus?
- Desiring to obey Jesus?
- Pursuing holiness like Jesus?
- Convicted of your sin?
- Mourning over your sin?
- Repenting of your sin?
- Growing evidentially in Christ-likeness?

At some point **the church began to drift** from Christ-centeredness and left its **first love**

- Pursued other loves and/or lesser things
 - Causes, personalities, events, gifts, politics, ideas, morals, ethics, religious form, mere ritual
 - All fine—none of them the main thing
- **People were able to enter in and be in without Jesus**
- = **death** -- And they did not know it (But **Jesus** did!)

The church does not die only by sinning—the church that is dead **goes on sinning**

- Sinning is always blinding (always causes drifting)
 - THAT IS PART OF WHY WE REPENT—**the church lives by confessing** (1 John 1:9)
- When the church is willfully sinning rather than confessing, people enter in without repenting (gospel)
 - There are some who see themselves as being in the church but are not (“**Lord, Lord...**”)
 - There are some who are alive (perhaps) but perpetuating death

Moving toward life (verses 2-3)

- **Wake up** (1 Peter 5:8)
- **Strengthen** (Finish well; Hebrew 12:1-3)
- **Remember** (Rehearse the gospel)
- **Keep it** (obey)
- **Repent** (get right)

The threat (3^b)

- **If therefore you will not wake up I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you**
 - May refer to them not being ready for **His return**
 - May refer to the City of Sardis' history of being **defeated twice** through foolish non-vigilant self-reliance (root cause)
 - **Meaning:** Jesus will shut the church down (Cf. 2:5)
 - It is an act of judgment **and** an act of mercy
 - Death begets death (in a church)

There was a living remnant (Verse 4) (Gospel)

The promise

- **Verse 5**
 - **Overcome** = stick with Jesus
 - **White garments** = purity and celebration
 - **Book of life** = Lamb's book
 - This is a promise, not a threat
 - **Confess** = confirmation of salvation
 - Matthew 10:32 (NLT)

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

The call

- **Verse 6**
 - **Do you hear this?**
 - A **wake up** call and an invitation
- Some of you are not dead, but you are on **a trajectory of death** (Cf. **Church in Ephesus**)
- Fooling with things of death; not living fully in Christ; or resting on your past and neglecting the present
- Unguarded walls—inviting the attack of the enemy (1 Peter 5:8)

Jesus started by saying He had **the seven Spirits of God** (= Holy Spirit)

- John 6:63 (NIV)

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.