

Revelation. Sardis- a Dying Church
Revelation 3 v 1 – 6 Jeremiah 23 v 1 – 4

We wouldn't want the Lord Jesus to talk to us like this. Neither did the congregation in Sardis. But He did! God's Word has as many pages of warning and challenge as it does messages of comfort and encouragement. And sometimes the Lord, before He can bless and increase us again, may have to humble His people with shame and exile and bring us back to our knees in penitent obedience, as He did in Old Testament times with a remnant of his ancient people Israel.

Sardis was a city built on a hilltop like Athens and surrounded by a strong wall. Its citizens thought their defences were impregnable. However, history records that the city did fall to enemies. Someone found a way to climb the cliffs and scale the walls and when they did they found the residents hadn't even bothered posting guards! The city fell because they were complacent, happy to depend on their reputation of being strong, rather than actually being trained and on guard.

And the Lord Jesus pulls no punches as He warns the Christian congregation who lived in Sardis. Watch out! He says. Don't depend on a good reputation or the glories of past days. Spiritually you are in fact so weak you are more dead than alive! Wake up! Realise there's a war on! Remember and practice all you've been called to be and do, or my return in glory will come as a hideous surprise and you'll be found unready, your service lacking and reprehensible!

Let's look at Christ's message to His people through the congregation of Sardis under 3 headings:

1. The Assessment
2. the Wake up Call
3. the Assurance

1. The Assessment. How would we assess our own lives and the life and work of our congregation? We might think we are doing alright. Others around us might think the same, pat us on the back and say “Well done!” But what does Jesus think of us – that’s the assessment that really matters!

To have a good reputation with our neighbours doesn’t mean the Lord finds our life and service complete and acceptable. To have a history of good work in the past doesn’t mean we are spiritually alive and vibrant and being fruitful in the present. If we’re not increasing in the fruit of the Spirit and growing and reaching out more than ever in the love of Christ, what are we doing? Withering? Dying? Could it be that we are in fact sleeping spiritually, hardly bothering to humble ourselves in prayer, oblivious to the fact that the enemy is scaling the walls and making inroads in our fellowship and community?

2. Christ gives His dying church in Sardis a loud ‘wake up call’.

Wake up and man the defences! Remember what we’ve been given, what has been entrusted to us. It’s not too late to strengthen what remains. We may feel sadly depleted, just a remnant of what once was, but let us be found faithful to our Lord when He returns!

What have we been given? Why, the Gospel of course! The liberating, life-changing, sin-forgiving, soul-saving Good News of Jesus and His redeeming love. This is the truth that sets us free from guilt and sorrow and the oppression of evil. This is the power to bind spiritual enemies and demolish their strongholds. These are the weapons to make the gates of Hell tremble.

And God has entrusted the Gospel of Christ to His Church! He pours out His Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of obedient Christians that we might be a potent force for good in the communities where we live, shining brightly for Jesus, demonstrating hope and a better way.

It’s not just those of us elected to leadership, to be like ‘little shepherds’ under Christ, to care for and guide His people by example

– those challenged by the prophet Jeremiah. It's all of us – every church member. All of us must hear Christ's wake up call and carefully consider His challenge. Have we been feasting when we should have been fasting? Sleeping when we should have been praying? Indulging ourselves when we should have been witnessing for Him?

His wake up call is a call to us all to repent and turn away from everything that would hinder His work in our lives and fellowship, anything that would compromise our witness to His grace and love. It's a call to return to Him with fresh devotion and trust and obedience.

Remember what we've been given. Remember what that makes us in Him – we are God's children and ambassadors for Christ. Church is not a social club – it's a fellowship of grateful recovering sinners who live to worship and glorify the One Who has saved us. This is our primary goal – this is why we are here!

So – back to church! Back to the Bible! Back to the place of prayer! Shore up those cracks in the defences. Let's take up the armour of God and be ready to send the enemy packing!

For only thus will we be found ready to welcome our Lord when he returns. We don't want to be surprised and embarrassed like someone who didn't lock the door and got burgled. We want to be at our posts, contending for His name, ready to stand and salute!

3. For note thirdly the reward He promises. Here is the assurance for those who are faithful. Who don't soil their clothes with careless decadence or unspiritual pettiness but stay awake and alert in His service.

Our names are recorded in Heaven. The Lord Jesus will publically own us as His before His Father's throne. We will stand by His grace among those He has forgiven and redeemed by his blood. We will be invited to walk with Him, found worthy to keep company with the

Son of God because we are clothed in His perfect righteousness. Not depending on our own reputation, but trusting completely in His.

Let us listen carefully to our Lord's assessment of His Church. Let us wake up, remember what we've been given and strengthen what remains. Encouraged by His assurance that His faithful will walk with Him, dressed in white.

And on that day, by the amazing grace of the Good Shepherd, not one of His flock will be missing.

Amen