

Christ Community Covenant Church
Revelation: I have a letter for you
What can be worse than 'dead'? The churches of Sardis and Laodicea
Pastor Dave Scherrer - July 17, 2011

We are steaming towards the climax of this series. There is a dramatic turn happening this morning in our study of the letters of Jesus to the churches of Asia Minor recorded in the book of Revelation. So far we have studied the letter to the churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira. In each of these cities the news for them is mixed. Jesus has something good to say about them and then a word of confrontation. Today though we are going to look at two of the three remaining churches, holding off on the church of Philadelphia. And there is no more Mr. Nice Guy. Jesus lays into these churches from the cities of Sardis and Laodicea. And he invites us all to listen in.

We will begin with the church at Sardis. Did you see the movie "Dead Man Walking?" It is the story of an inmate on death row. The line "dead man walking" refers to when the inmate scheduled for execution is led to their death and the guard yells out to the other inmates that phrase. Dead man walking. Alive, but only kinda.

Sardis – "Dead man walking"

Revelation 3:1b-2

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

What men thought - That they had a name, a reputation
What men saw – An alive and active church full of church 'activity'
What the Lord saw and knew – They were dead!

Reputation – A reputation is built on past performance. As a ball player or boxer ages, they may rely on their reputation - what does that mean? They are no longer the athlete they once were, but you might be able to fool someone based on that old reputation.

Being alive – In the case of church, alive might mean any number of things, but it would be especially alive to God and his priorities in the world. An alive church would not only worship with vibrancy, but there would be an urgency to living well into the Kingdom of God and extending the Kingdom of God.

Dead - means God no longer lives there

[Good news – there have been many God sightings here, most notably from visitors from various church backgrounds]

Turns out Sardis was not dead only "mostly dead"

Revelation 3:3 ESV

Remember, 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.

This idea of coming like a thief is a common theme of Jesus. In this case the church at Sardis is playing a betting game with God. We think, I can get away with living on my reputation for a while as long as I get my act together in enough time - and don't get caught. Jesus is saying this is a fool's game. Whether you are a church or a member of a church, saying "I can live the loose life for a while and then when it gets close to being 'my time', I will re-dedicate my life" is worse than

foolishness – it is deadly. Jesus addressed this lifestyle of ‘skating by’ often, because it is a common attitude of the flesh.

Matthew 25:1-12

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

‘I did not know you.’ This is also an important teaching theme of Jesus. You see, knowing God and having Him know you is what it is all about! Of course knowing God is the joy of eternity, but God knowing us is dependent on our yielding to Him - His rule and His reign. It means living the victorious life, not of a so called sinless-ness by living a good enough life, but by choosing the garment of Christ’s atonement for us, repenting and choosing life hidden in Christ.

Revelation 3:4-6 ESV

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

‘I will confess his name before my Father who is in Heaven’

Matthew 10:32

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.

And we know that the opposite is true too, that if we do not confess Jesus to others, then Jesus will not confess us before the Father. You cannot pretend with God or play a waiting game with God. You can only do business with God. Maybe it is time to quit relying on a past reputation and it is time to get off your mostly dead hind end and repent. For the mostly dead person, there is great reward for returning home!

Prayer

Laodicea – ‘It is harder for a rich man to get to heaven than it is for . . .’

I used to ask my audiences, especially my teen aged audiences, “How do you think you are doing on a scale of one to ten when it comes to living a devoted life in Christ? If you choose 1 to 3 that means you have little to show for your faith. Maybe 4 to 6 is in the middle - not too bad but also really if you were honest not too good either. Kind of lukewarm. The 7 to 8 range is quite a bit better, with 9 and 10 being red hot for God, holding nothing back.

Let’s see how many 4, 5 or sixes we have.

Revelation 3:15-18 The Message

"I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless.

"Here's what I want you to do: Buy your gold from me, gold that's been through the refiner's fire. Then you'll be rich. Buy your clothes from me, clothes designed in Heaven. You've gone around half-naked long enough. And buy medicine for your eyes from me so you can see, really see.

The Tri-Fold Curse

Desire for Personal Power – The Sin of Idolatry

Lust for Immoral Sex – The Sin of Immorality

Pursuit of Money – the Sin of Indulgence

Two weeks ago we talked about the sin in the church of idolatry, of setting up an idol in competition with God for his authority and power in our lives. We don't talk about idolatry much anymore but it is really the sin of not trusting God to have our best interests in mind, so we hedge our bets by adding another 'god' to give us what we want.

Then last week we spoke of the 'Jezebels' in our lives, the person or circumstance that distracts us from God. Sexual immorality and idolatry are the Desire for Personal Power and the Lust for sexual satisfaction outside of God's plan for power and sexual intimacy.

Finally there is the third of the Tri-Fold Curse, that is the pursuit of money, because with enough money, I can buy the power and comfort and pleasure I want.

Matthew 19:21-24

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

Luke 16:25

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

Scripture is clear; wealth is a hardship when it comes to engaging the Kingdom of God. It lulls us into a sleepy indifference of the things of God. And persecution and suffering are benefits to entering the Kingdom of God. They purify us and strengthen us.

So let me ask you a question - According to Jesus, here in America, the church of the wealthiest country in the world, where persecution is non-existent and where we can buy our way out of suffering, are we blessed or cursed?

What is worse than dead . . . Indifference!

"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference." Elie Wiesel

"Christians have no business thinking that the good life consists mainly in not doing bad things. We have no business thinking that to do evil in this world you have to be a Bengal tiger, when, in

fact, it is enough to be a tame tabby—a nice person but not a good one. In short, Pentecost makes it clear that nothing is so fatal to Christianity as indifference." William Sloan Coffin

And course the world is too indifferent anyway; indifference is a primary tool of Satan.

Kitty Genovese was the young woman who was murdered in a New York residential section while at least 38 neighbors watched from their windows. During the course of the 30-minute assault, no one even telephoned the police. Studies have uncovered some surprising facts about these people. Interviews revealed that they were not totally indifferent as many had suspected. The main reason nobody did anything was that each person thought someone else would take the initiative to get help.

But for Christians, wealth will lead us to the brink of a different kind of indifference; Indifference to God.

God wants us to seek first the Kingdom of God and then all the things like clothes and food will be added.

The "Medicine for your eyes" statement is a reference to the idea of seeing while you can still see. God wants us to look deep inside ourselves and see if we are relying on an old reputation for faith.

Revelation 3:19-21 Message

"The people I love, I call to account—prod and correct and guide so that they'll live at their best. Up on your feet, then! About face! Run after God!

"Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you. Conquerors will sit alongside me at the head table, just as I, having conquered, took the place of honor at the side of my Father. That's my gift to the conquerors! Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches."

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

This is an encouraging word for sinners, Christ stands at the door of our hearts and constantly knocks, but in the context that it is written it is dripping with irony. Christ is standing at the door of the church and saying, "Let me in, I have so much power and joy set aside for you. You have shut me out!"

"God, have mercy on me a sinner!"