

“Sardis – The Dead Church”

Ezekiel 37: 1 - 14; Romans 13:11- 14; Matthew 24: 36 – 44; **Revelation 3: 1 – 6** (Sermon)

The city of Sardis was situated at the junction of five main roads; so it was a major center for trade.

The city was started as a military fortress up on top of the mountain because it inaccessible.

The city later expanded to the valley below.

The acropolis of Sardis was about 1,500 feet above the main roads.

In verse 1 we read about ***“The Seven Spirits of God”***.

The number 7 is the perfect or complete number in The Bible.

So the ***“The Seven Spirits of God”*** refers to the complete personality and the complete ministry of God The Holy Spirit.

The title ***“The Seven Spirits of God”*** was also used in Revelation. 1:4.

Jesus was writing to the Christians at Sardis so the ***“works”*** Jesus was referring to in verse 1 are works that Christians do because they are saved.

Also in verse 1 Jesus said that the church at Sardis had a reputation of being alive.

In other words, the church had a lot of ongoing activities and members.

But Jesus said the church at Sardis was a dead church.

Their reputation did not match their reality.

Remember The LORD does not look at the things the same way that people do.

People judge at the outward appearance, but our LORD looks at a person’s heart.

We read this in 1st Samuel 16:7 ***“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”***

Friends it does not matter what other people think about Mt Paran.

What is important is what Jesus thinks about Mt Paran!

So the important question for us today is; would Jesus Mt Paran Presbyterian Church is alive or would Jesus say Mt Paran is dead?

A tree that has decay on the inside may look fine on the outside, but when a strong wind comes, that tree with decay will fall down.

A church can look alive to people but be spiritually dead.

I have listed a few examples to help us think about the difference between a dead church and a church that is alive.

- Live churches depend on God's resources. Dead churches depend upon their resources.
- Live churches focus on people. Dead churches focus on programs.
- Live churches preach The Gospel of Jesus. Dead churches preach a gospel of prosperity.
- Live churches have committed Christians. Dead churches have casual Christians.
- Live churches focus on their future. Dead churches focus on their past.
- Live churches are actively involved in evangelism. Dead churches keep the good news of Jesus to themselves.
- Live churches are concerned about ministering to their community. Dead churches are only concerned about themselves.
- Live churches are filled with generous people who tithe. Dead churches are filled with stingy people who only tip.
- Live churches follow The Lord. Dead churches only talk about following The Lord.

The Apostle John gave this warning in 1st John 2:15 - 17; ***“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”***

In Revelation 3:1 Jesus said the church at Sardis was dead, but that church was not completely dead because in verse 2 Jesus said; ***“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die”.***

While the church at Sardis was mostly dead there was still hope.

Most of the members in the church at Sardis had been lulled to sleep by Satan.

But Jesus is The Life. (John 14:6)

Jesus is The One who gives life and Jesus proved that He can raise the dead by raising Lazarus from the grave. (John 11:44)

And in John 11:25 Jesus said; ***“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die”.***

Jesus also said; ***“I am The One who holds The Spirit who gives life”.*** (Revelation 3:1)
Jesus is also warning us to wake up and be spiritually alert.

We live in an evil world and we need to be alert.

1st Peter 5:8 & 9 warn us; ***“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”***

In verse 2, Jesus tells them, ***“strengthen what remains for I have not found your deeds complete”***.

In other words, they talked the talk but they did not walk the walk.

They did not put their faith into practice.

Apparently, God’s Word was not changing the way these Christians lived.

This morning we all need to ask ourselves;

“does God’s commandment to love my neighbor change the way I interact with my co-workers?”

“have I completely forgiven the people who have insulted me and wronged me? “

“do I just listen to God’s word or does God’s word change the way I think, the way I talk and the way I act.”

Verse 4 states; ***“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.”***

The ones ***“who had not soiled their clothes”*** were the few Christians at Sardis who were faithful and were walking with The Lord.

There was an ember of faith that still glowed in the church at Sardis.

There was also hope for the unfaithful Christians if they would repent and choose to follow the example of the faithful Christians at Sardis.

Our God is a God of Second Chances and our God is patient and merciful but The Bible is very clear, when The Lord comes it will be too late to repent then.

Church leaders have the responsibility to set the example and to lead the people in the ways of righteousness.

The spirituality of a church will never rise above the spirituality of the church leaders.

That is why we need to seriously pray for The Lord to show us who He has chosen to serve as Elders and Deacons.

It is also the responsibility of the church leaders to cast the vision for the church as well as to provide multiple opportunities for the people to grow spiritually.

However, it is each member's responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities offered for spiritual growth.

It is also each member's responsibility to pray for their church leaders.

Even though Jesus said the church at Sardis was dead there was still hope.

In our scripture lesson from Ezekiel we read about the valley of dry bones.

The dry bones in Ezekiel represented the Nation of Israel.

Israel was defeated and scattered because they had disobeyed God, they had prostituted themselves with false gods, and they left God out of their life.

This prophecy in Ezekiel was made to give hope to the Israelites who were totally defeated and living as captives in a foreign land.

God is promising to physically and spiritually restore the nation of Israel.

Remember the physical in The Bible always points to a spiritual truth, so this prophecy in Ezekiel also speaks to any person who is dead in trespasses and sins and any church that is dead.

Jesus proved that He is able to raise the dead. (John 11:44)

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25)

This is also a reminder that when we proclaim The Good News of Jesus to an unsaved person, we like Ezekiel, can be the instrument Jesus uses to give spiritual life to a person who is spiritually dead.

Jesus's third and fourth command is in verse 3; ***“Remember what you received and hold fast to it.”***

Remember we were all condemned to spiritual and eternal death before Jesus saved us from the penalty of our sins.

We were sentenced to spend eternity in hell before Jesus took our place.

We were enemies of God before Jesus declared us to be righteous.

But now God is our friend. But now God is for us and God The Holy Spirit lives in us.

Now we are a part of God's family.

Now our eternal home is in heaven with God. The Greek word remember is in the present tense which signifies a continuing need for us to remember.

Jesus' fifth command is also in verse 3; ***“Repent.”***

To repent is to turn away from our sinful attitude and our sinful acts and to turn to God.

To repent involves admitting our sin and being ashamed of our sins.

Repenting is a deliberate conscious action we take to turn away from our sinful acts.

Repenting is feeling so bad about the way our sin offended The Lord that we do not want to ever repeat that sinful act.

Repenting is a sincere desire for The Lord to change us as well as a sincere desire to live a righteous life.

Also in verse 3 Jesus said if you do not heed my warning ***“I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”*** (verse 3)

Remember Sardis was known as being an impenetrable city since it was located on top of a mountain and the only way to it was by narrow winding mountain roads.

In our lesson from Matthew 24, we read Jesus words to His disciples.

“Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Matthew 24: 42 – 44)

The Lord’s coming in verse 44 refers to Jesus second coming but it also refers to The Lord’s judgement which can and does come on sinners at any time.

What about you; are you longing for Jesus to come and straighten out this mess we have made on earth?

Sadly, today many Christians are only living for their own pleasure.

They say *“I will devote more time to my relationship with The Lord as soon as I finish my school.”*

“ I will give more money to The Lord as soon as I get my finances in order.”

“I will have time to go to Bible Study when my children grow up.”

Friends; we all need to ask ourselves; *“Am I ready for Jesus to come for me right now?”*

“What last minute preparations would you make in the next 24 hours if you knew that Jesus was going to call you home tomorrow morning at 11:00 am?”

In verse 4 we read that ***“a few people in Sardis had not soiled their clothes”***.

The word soiled means, “to stain,” “to defile,” “to smear,” or “to pollute.”

Spiritual they had not defiled themselves; they were still clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.

Soiled was a word that would have been very familiar to the people Sardis because many of those people used dye in color wool.

Verses 4 & 5 remind us why we need to get out spiritual life in order and why we should be living for The Lord every day.

“The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.”

White in the Bible refers to purity.

Garments in scripture often symbolize character. (Isaiah 64:6; Jude 23)

Notice the promise Jesus makes in verse 5 to the person who overcomes; ***“I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.”***

Are you sure that your name is in The Lamb’s Book of Life?

If you are **not** 100% absolutely positive that your name is in The Lamb’s Book of Life I beg you to bow your head and in silent prayer, admit that you are a sinner, admit that you cannot save yourself, and ask Jesus to save you from the penalty of your sins.

Friend please do not put off making this most important decision you will ever make.

Your eternal destination depends upon it.

Remember the only people who will end up in hell are the people who refuse or neglect to ask Jesus to save them.

If you **are** sure you sure that your name is in The Lamb’s Book of Life now would be a good time to thank Jesus again for saving you from spending eternity in hell.

You see even though we all have sinned, none of us have loved The Lord the way we should, all of us have disappointed Jesus, and none of us deserve to go to heaven.

Yet in verse 5 Jesus promised; ***“I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.”***

Once we are saved, we cannot lose our salvation because our salvation is secured by Jesus and our salvation is preserved by Jesus.

A sinful lifestyle will separate us from God's presence and God's blessings but our salvation is secured by Jesus.

In John 10:28 – 29; Jesus said; *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all^{l[e]}; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.*

In the conclusion of every one of the letters to the seven churches, The Lord always concludes with encouragement and hope to those people who overcome their circumstance.

Jesus promises those believers who continued to walk in holiness will be clothed His righteousness.

Earlier I said the question for us today is what would Jesus say about Mt Paran Presbyterian Church.

That is certainly an important question for us this morning.

But a more important question for each one of us this morning is what would Jesus say about my relationship with Him.

Would Jesus say my relationship with Him is dead, almost dead, or would Jesus say my relationship with Him was alive and well?

God's word to us today challenges all of us to reevaluate our relationship with Jesus and for each one of us to recommit our time, our talents, our treasures, and our life to Jesus The Christ.

AMEN