THE DANGER OF

A GOOD REPUTATION

 **DATE: 6/24/2018 am**

**TEXT: Revelation 3:1-6**

**INTRODUCTION**

We are continuing to look at the Dangers that Face our Church

In the Book of Revelation, Chapters 1-3 we find the LORD telling the Apostle John to write letters to the churches in Asia Minor (Modern Day Turkey)

These letters are addressed to the Pastors (angels) of those churches and have a message for the whole church

So far, we have looked at the Letters to the Churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira

In Ephesus the Main Message was that they had left their First Love

In Smyrna it was that Suffering was coming, and they were not to be Afraid

In Pergamos it was the Danger of Compromise

In Thyatira the Danger was Tolerance

This morning we will be looking at the 5th Letter written to the Church in Sardis, and its Message

Each letter follows a reoccurring pattern

In each, Jesus provides …

-- A Description of Himself

-- A Compliment for the Church

-- A Correction with an Admonition to Repent

(2 churches are not corrected)

-- Then in every letter He makes a promise ***“to him that overcometh”***

A promise that applies even to us

-- He then gives us some insight into some of the Rewards of Heaven

As we come to the Church at Sardis we find them being corrected for something you and I might consider right

It’s funny the way people think sometimes

But if our thinking doesn’t line up with Scriptures …

Then we are not thinking right

What do we want visitors to say about our church?

As a pastor, it’s a question that’s on my mind

I’m sure each of us also share a concern for our church’s name in the community

Most churches work hard to gain a Good Reputation

We have “traditional” and “contemporary” churches, “charismatic” and “non-charismatic” churches, “denominational” and “non-denominational” churches

A lot of visitors will make decisions about a church based on its name

What ever brings them here is fine, but what I really want to know is how they liked it

I like to ask – *“How did you hear about us?” “What encouraged you about our service today?”*

I’m always particularly blessed when they mention how good the message was

But Then, the Holy Spirit convicts and reminds me that it’s not about how well I preached or any other aspect of the church service (The Music, Friendly atmosphere)

(That’s all just sinful pride)

If we’re not careful, our boasting in our convictions may gain us a reputation for being *“alive”* when in fact …

We’re just another church offering what a certain consumer wants - in our case, Old Fashioned Religion

The problem, however, is that when all is said and done,

It doesn’t matter how the visitors view our church

What really matters is Jesus’ Assessment

The real question is …

How will Jesus Evaluate our church?

That’s the question answered in the message to the church at Sardis

What our church faces is the Danger of Pride

That we would rely on our own ability to build the church and boast in a name we’ve made for ourselves,

When in fact, underneath the exterior, Jesus says that we’re ***“dead”***

Let’s pray and look at …

**“The Danger of a Good Reputation”**

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. THE “PRONOUNCEMENTS” – v. 1**

***“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”***

First, we notice the Pronouncement of …

**A. His ‘Deity’**

Jesus comes to this church as the One Who has the **“*seven Spirits of God*”** and as the One holding the **“*seven stars*”**

I think I defined these in an earlier Message (In case I didn’t)

 **1.** The **“*seven Spirits of God*”**

… Refers to the Holy Spirit’s Perfect ministry

(Seven is God’s Number of Perfection in the Bible)

The Seven-Fold ministry of the Holy Spirit is defined in **Isaiah 11:2** …

***“And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;”***

Jesus gives the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

This is a reminder to the churches that we are to operate …

Not under the power of human skill, leadership and organization, but under the Perfect Power of the Holy Spirit

When the church walks in the power of the flesh, we’ll always fail

But when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, there will be success

**Galatians 5:16 – *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”***

And the only way you will walk in the Spirit is by being faithful (consistent) to Bible Reading, Prayer &

Hearing the Preaching of the Word of God

When the human spirit is in control of the human body - amazing things can be accomplished

For instance, a pianist can sit down at a keyboard; perform thousands of delicate, precise movements that will produce beautiful music

However, let that same pianist suffer some injury that leaves him paralyzed, were the mind is no longer in control of those arms, hands and fingers

Then, try as he might, the human spirit cannot will the hands to make music

So too, when the Spirit of God is in control of the members of a church, great things can be accomplished

 However, when the Holy Spirit is not, paralysis is the result and nothing can be accomplished

Christ is the Head of the Church and He leads the church through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit

**2.** The **“*seven stars*”** are the Pastors of the churches

**Revelation 1:20 – *“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:”***

They are the messengers who bring the people the Word of God

Jesus appears as the One Who has everything the church needs to succeed

His Spirit has all the Power our church needs

His Word has all the Direction our church needs

Jesus seems to be saying - “*If you will submit to Me, you will find in Me all you need to accomplish My mission in this world*”

Unfortunately, it seems that most folks aren’t very interested in the Lord’s Mission

Men are trying every method under the sun to reach people, and to do the work of the church

But, all the power we need is found in the fullness of the Holy Ghost and in the Word of God

What we need is not new methods; but a new desire to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit and do everything according to the teachings of the Word of God

Next, we notice the Pronouncement of …

**B. His ‘Discernment’**

Notice that He says in **v. 1 –** ***“I know thy works”***

Again, we see Him declaring His omniscient

(The ability to know everything)

He’s Not Commending their works though

He’s telling them that He knows what they’re doing

He knows everything we are doing as well!

He sees it all, along with the motives that drive us to do what we do

**Hebrews 4:12-13 – *“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”
“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”***

**Psalm 139:2 – *“Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off”***

He sees us as a church, and He sees us as individuals

He knows our heart

He knows everything we do and He knows Why we do it

 That should be a sobering thought

Then thirdly, we see the Pronouncement of …

**C. His “Diagnosis”**

To **Diagnose** something is *to identify the nature of (an illness or other problem) by examination of the symptoms*

Their Works gave them the Appearance of Life

Jesus tells them that they have that reputation

They were a busy, working church, with a great reputation among men

From all outward appearances, this church was everything a church ought to be

They believed the right things and they were busy doing good all over the community

Everyone who saw them, looked at them as a church that was going places

I am sure that when people moved to Sardis from other towns, their Pastors suggested that they visit this church

It had all the appearances of life

But - things were not as they seemed!

***“thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”***

The Great Physician placed His finger on the pulse of this church and pronounced them dead!

No matter what others thought - Jesus knew the truth

He tells them that even though someone may think you are alive, you are, in fact, ***“dead”!***

That word means just what it says!

Like a dead man, the church at Sardis was …

*… destitute of force or power. They were ineffective and inoperative*

They were spiritually dead!

There was activity, but it was not spiritual in nature

There was busyness, but they were bringing nothing eternal to pass

They were preaching, but lives were not being changed and sinners were not being saved

They were busy, but they were operating in the energy of the flesh and not the energy of the Spirit of God

Everyone looked at them and spoke of their Life

Jesus, the One Who knew then better than anyone, looked at them and pronounced them dead!

Looks are deceiving!

Jesus said by their fruit He will know them

Many churches are in that same shape today

They have all the appearance of life, but the Great Physician, Who has His finger on their pulse, knows they are dead

His finger is on the pulse of CBBC today

Does He feel a pulse? Is it strong and steady?

Or, is it weak and failing?

What does He know about our church that we may not know?

**1.** Here are some of the signs of a dying church

-- A dying church rests on its past accomplishments and is satisfied with its presence state

-- A dying church is more concerned about their rituals and their formalities than they are about spirituality

-- A dying church is more concerned about social change than they are about seeing people changed by the Spirit of God

-- A dying church is more concerned with material growth than it is with spiritual growth

-- A dying church is more concerned with pleasing men that it is with pleasing God

 -- A dying church clings more tightly to its creeds

 and confessions that it does to the Word of God

-- A dying church is one that loses its conviction that the Bible is the Word of God

**2.** Here are the signs of Life in a church

-- Growth

All living things are characterized by growth

As long as you and I live in these bodies, we are to be maturing; changing; and growing

When the growth stops - it means we are dead!

The church is no exception

When people think of growth in the church;

They immediately think of numerical growth

I think that’s part of it

But, the primary way a church demonstrates life is through spiritual growth

A church that is alive will continue to develop spiritually

When a church ceases to grow spiritually, it is dying

-- Harmony

When a physical body develops problems, it is because there is disharmony in the body

 Cancer is a good example of this

Some of the cells become infected by the cancer and they attack other cells in the body

If this is left unchecked, the result will be disintegration and death of the body

The same is true in the church

When a church is alive and well, there will be unity and harmony in the fellowship

When there isn’t, the body is diseased and is headed for trouble

Unless the infected parts come back into harmony

When a church becomes fractured, it is headed for disaster and death

-- Emotion

Another mark of life in the physical realm is emotion

Because I am alive, I can laugh; I cry; I feel pain; I feel joy; I have emotions and they demonstrate the fact that I am alive

When a physical body dies, one of the clearest indications is the total lack of emotion

The deceased person does not show one sign of emotion

They can’t because they are dead

Again, the same is true in the church

 A Living church is an Emotional church!

There will be frequent times when we will laugh …

… together, weep together, shout together, sing together, hurt together, and pray together

In other words, when there is life, there is emotion

-- Motion

Another sign of life is motion

Physical bodies are bodies in motion

One sure sign of death is the absence of motion

So, it is within the church

When there is life in a church, there will be motion

We are moving forward

The church will be active in the world doing the work of the Lord

So, how do we measure up?

Do we exhibit the signs of Life - or the signs of Death?

I don’t think we’re dead!

But, I do think we could show more signs of Life

**The Lord’s Diagnosis**

**THE “PRONOUNCEMENTS”**

**II. THE “PRESCRIPTION” - vs. 2,3**

***“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God” “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”***

The church in Sardis is in sad shape, but not all is lost!

 It appears that there is still hope for them to make some changes and get back where they need to be

If they’ll just follow Jesus’ Prescribed remedy

Jesus Prescribes 3 things (Let’s look at them)

First, Jesus Commands them to …

**A. ‘Watch’**

**1.** They are told to (**v. 2**) ***“Be watchful***”

This literally means to “***chase sleep***”

This church is a church with a glorious past

Now, they have allowed their past success to lull them into a state of complacency and spiritual slumber

Jesus calls upon them to *chase away the sleep*

 He commands them to wake up and realize that the victories of yesterday are not sufficient for today!

When we allow ourselves to sleep because of what we have enjoyed in the past - we are going to find ourselves conquered by the enemy

**I Peter 5:8** – ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”***

We have a constant responsibility to Watch & Warn

**2.** Spiritual apathy sets in

This happens far too often in churches

A church will struggle in the beginning and the core group who founded that church will have to work, pray, witness, give and yield to God to see the church stay alive

Over time - more people come in - More money comes in

A Building is bought and good services are enjoyed

Yet - in the midst of all these good things, something terrible begins to happens

The church begins to lose the vision that made them so strong in their early years

 They become content to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labors

And - while we ought to be thankful for what the Lord has done for us - we should never reach a place where we let up!

There is no time to look back to yesterday!

Our vision ought to be for today and tomorrow

Look around! We’re aging! Who will take our place?

Look around! We may be filling up - but our vision is diming!

Look around! We are satisfied with what we have and we have lost the fire that made us strong!

We must fight the tendency to become still, satisfied, complacent, and apathetic

Jesus said – ***“Be Watchful”***

Then Jesus Tells them to …

**B. ‘Work’**

The Lord gives this church 4 activities that they are to be busily engaged in

These things will help any church that has been caught napping!

**1.** Get Revived – **v. 2**

“***strengthen the things which remain***”

He tells them that not everything about them has died

 There are still some things that have a spark of life

These things are to be Revived before they die out

The phrase, “***that are ready to die***”, literally means

*… that which is knocking at death's door*

This is a call for them to get stirred up again for the things of God! / It’s called a revival!

End of **v. 2 -** “***For I have not found thy works perfect before God***”

This means that their works were incomplete and did not stir Heaven

They are doing some things that are good

But they are works that need reviving before they will make an eternal difference

They were singing – praying – teaching - preaching and giving - but their works were not stirring Heaven

They were accomplishing nothing of eternal value

They were a dead people doing dead works

It’s possible to be busy doing things for God and yet to be doing nothing for God

Unless our works are complete - they will never reach Heaven - and there will be no glory for God in the church

What churches like this need is to be stirred by the Spirit of God to new life and activity for the glory of God!

Revival

Then He tells them to …

**2.** Remember **– v. 3 a 1**

***“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard”***

These people are counseled to remember where the Lord brought them from and what He has done for them

They are to remember the days when they served the Lord out of a glad heart and wanted more than anything to do His will!

They are to remember what it was like to walk in the power of God while the fire burned and He used them for His glory!

Memories can be good or a bad things

When our memories cause us to live in the past and rest on them, then they are bad

However - if memories wake us up and cause …

… us to be resurrected in the present - then memory serves a great purpose!

If we are to remember anything, let us remember the God Who makes churches great for His glory and let’s seek Him once again!

Revive, Remember

**3.** Resolve **– v. 3 a 2**

***“and hold fast”***

This church is told to hold on to the things that are still alive

 They are to Resolve before the Lord that they will not allow those things to die as well

There is always a danger in focusing our attention in one area or another

We must not revive one thing while we allow another to die

Doing so leaves us in the same condition we are already in

What we are looking for is a total transformation

That preserves the living things and revives the things ready to die!

Revive / Remember / Resolve

**4.** Repent **– v. 3 a 3**

***“and repent”***

In this part of the verse - they are confronted concerning their sin

When the things of God are allowed to die, the only recourse the church has is repentance!

The idea of repentance is so foreign today

People seem to have the opinion that whatever they want to do is just fine and should be accepted by everyone

God is not obliged to accept the things we do!

When there is sin in the life of an individual

There must be Repentance before there can be Restoration and Revival

The same is true for a church

 When a church has allowed itself to be lulled into a state of slumber

Their only hope is to repent!

So, what does it mean to repent?

It means that we come to a place where we experience a change of mind about our sins that results in a change of direction

We turn from our sins and we turn toward God

Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action!

How long has it been since we (as individuals) (as a church) have repented before the Lord for our laziness, our complacency, out apathy, our wickedness, our deadness?

Then, they are told to …

**C. ‘Wait’ – v. 3 b**

***“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”***

This church is told that if they will not do the serious work of changing themselves

That the Lord Himself will come into their midst and take away the things that remain alive and that church will be totally and fully dead!

Like a thief, He will come in and take the best

And they aren’t even aware of it / They’re dead

Many churches are in that very condition today!

When the call to repentance came from the Lord

They ignored it and He came to them in swift judgment

Now - they function the same way they always have!

They have services - They have preaching - They have outreach ministries - They give to missions - But, they are dead!

They are ineffective!

They are merely going through the motions!

There is no life

Jesus has pulled the plug and pronounced them dead!

The Lord has written “*Ichabod*” over the door and no one is even aware of it

Like Samson, the Lord has left them and **“*they wist not that the Lord had departed*”**

That is a situation we want to avoid at all costs!

**THE “PRONOUNCEMENTS”**

**THE “PRESCRIPTION”**

**III. THE “PROMISES” – vs. 4,5**

There are 2 Promises here

**A. His Promise to the ‘Remnant’ – v. 4**

***“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy”***

As bad as things were in Sardis …

There were some there who were saved and seeking to serve the Lord

They are given the Lord’s promise that they will walk with Him in white

They have lived by the truth of God’s Word

And they can be confident that they will share His glory in the world to come

White clothing was worn in Roman times during festivals and times of celebration

It was a symbol of purity, victory, and festivity

What a Promise to the faithful members of that church

That is His Promise to all those who are saved by His grace

**B. His Promise to the ‘Repentant’ – v. 5**

***“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels”***

Jesus tells the rest that if they will repent, and turn to Him

They will receive some precious promises

***“the same shall be clothed in white raiment”***

They will be made pure and victorious

***“I will not blot out his name out of the book of life”***

They will be made secure in their relationship with Him

When someone is born they are written in the Book of Life

When someone is saved their name is transfer to the Lamb’s Book of Life

Someone who dies without having their name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will be blotted out one day

You see, the majority of the people in the church in Sardis were not just cold and out of God’s will

They were lost, and in need of salvation

 Jesus comes to them to give them an opportunity to be saved

I believe there are a lot more lost people in churches like ours then people want to admit

People who just go through the motions

People who are merely practicing dead works

Churches in that shape do not need revival - they need a resurrection!

**CONCLUSION**

**Ill.** Vance Havner once commented that ministries often begin with a man who has a vision. That vision is captured by others and becomes a movement. As the movement gains followers and momentum, it becomes a machine. After a while - people forget all about the vision and what was once a movement becomes nothing more than a monument to a man and a glorious past.

**Judges 2:10 – *“And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel”***

There is always the danger that any church can die

In **v. 6** Jesus warns – ***“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”***