



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

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ISSUE I

## REVIVING THE DEAD

Of all the churches in **Revelation 2-3**, there is no mention of persecution against Sardis. The text does not refer to any type of outward opposition. I would imagine that they had to deal with some type of persecution. All churches in every age of church history have in varying degrees. Yet, unlike the other churches of **Revelation 2-3**, they were not hard-pressed by fierce opposition from the outside.

At the same time, there is no mention of Satan and his work. They weren't like Smyrna where Satan actively opposed the church (**2:9-10**). They weren't battling Satan's false teachers who infiltrated the other churches and were leading people astray. There is nothing like that in Sardis.

The problem at Sardis was inward. The city of Sardis had an impressive cemetery with hundreds of burial mounds. This church had become a cemetery. It was dead spiritually. This church was outwardly active, conveying the impression of liveliness (**3:1**). It had a reputation for being alive. Yet, it was more like a cemetery than a church.

Why? Their spiritual deadness was self-imposed. It had surrendered to the culture around it. It blended in with the society where God had placed them. The church took no stand to fan the flames of persecution. Satan may have felt that Sardis was coming along rather nicely without his interference. He appeared to have thought that it was better to leave Sardis alone.

Yet, Jesus Christ loved this church. He sends His word to rebuke and restore it. The conditions had not reached the point of no return. The situation was serious, but it was not hopeless. Jesus offered renewal and hope to this spiritually dead church. He did it then and He still does it today. There is hope; the spiritually dead church can be revived.

### How Does A Church Become Spiritually Dead?

How did this church get into this shape? How does any church get in this shape? This text gives us three insights on how this happens to a church.

**First, it takes place when a church compromises with the culture.** In **Revelation 3:4**, Jesus says, "Thou has a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." This indicates the majority in the church had "defiled garments." This refers to the fact that they had indulged in the sins of the culture. They were living in the same sins as those outside of the church. Rather than being separate and seeking purity of life, they took part in the same sins as the culture around them. They had made peace with the society around them.

When this compromise takes place, the Spirit of God is grieved. When He is grieved, He refuses to release His power. Without this power, the church has no power. It is dead. At the same time, the church is not distinct from the culture around it. This compromise causes the church to blend in with society. It cannot influence society when it looks and sounds like the society around it.

**Second, it takes place when a church does not hold fast to God's Word.** Jesus tells this church to "remember therefore how thou hast received and heard" (**3:2**). From these words, we see that they were no longer clinging to the Word of God. Specifically, they were not reveling in the gospel of Jesus Christ as they had earlier. They had moved away from the Word of God as their final authority for faith and practice. The Bible was not the delight, the craving, of their lives. For that reason, their obedience was lacking and their witness was virtually non-existent.

This is what happens when a church does not hold fast to the Word of God. It leads to spiritual deadness. It may have much activity, but in God's sight, it is spiritually dead. It may appear to have life, but, in heaven's sight, it is lacking life. A true, living church cannot exist apart from holding fast to God's Word.

**Third, a church becomes spiritually dead when it lives in the past.** Sardis had been a famous and wealthy city. It had exercised tremendous political and military influence in the world. Yet, at this time, it was a

shell of its past. Two invasions of the city took its toll on Sardis. It no longer had the strength and influence it had formerly. That same spirit had infected the church. They were living off of their past fame and influence. They had no vision for the future, but only memories of their glorious past.

Living in the past can strip a church of its life and vitality. We should rejoice in and celebrate what God has done in the past. Yet, it is spiritually deadening to live in the past. We must press forward to the purpose and future that God has for the church. Living in the past can rob a church of God's future blessings.

### How Can A Dead Church Be Revived?

There is hope for the dead church. The fact that Jesus Christ confronts them and warns them shows that there is the possibility of a turnaround. Through Jesus Christ, there is the prospect of revival. Yet, how can a dead church be revived? In this text, Jesus offers the way for new life to be breathed into a dead church.

Jesus first says, "Wake up!" **Revelation 3:2** says, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." "Be watchful" means "wake up!" The church had to wake up to its condition. It had been lulled into a false sense of life and vitality.

This church believed the "myth of activity." What is this? It is the myth that if a church has a lot going on, it is spiritually alive. People often judge a church by how much activity it has. A full calendar must mean a healthy church. However, Jesus Christ has a different perspective! They had to wake up and realize their true condition. Before true revival comes, a church has to wake up – it has to acknowledge its spiritual deadness.

Jesus then says, "Remember!" **Revelation 3:3** says, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard." Jesus calls this church to remember the Word of God. The Word of God was to be the center of their lives and their church. They were to come back to the Word – reading, studying, memorizing, meditating, and obeying. They were to confess that Word to the society around them.

The word "remember" means more than to recall what is forgotten. It is to recall what has been forgotten and then act. Jesus wants us to remember and respond! A church can have high esteem for the Bible and yet forget the Bible. Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, exhorts us to remember the Word and act on the Word. He summons us to cherish, to crave, to devour, and to live out the Word of God.

To the dead church, Jesus says, "Hold fast" (**3:3**). Now Jesus invites them to restore their intimacy with Him. They were to return to Christ and hold fast to Him. They were to lay hold of Jesus and cling to Him. He invites them to quit living in the past and to walk with Him in the present. This is the way to spiritual renewal – to seek Christ and hold fast to Him day by day.

Finally, Jesus says, "Repent" (**3:3**). To repent is to make a decisive change of thought and behavior. It is to confess sin and then turn from the sin. The church could not continue on the path that it was on. It had to turn away from it and turn to Christ. That is the hope for spiritually dead church – to turn from its spiritual deadness and to turn to Jesus Christ.

### Who Can Revive The Dead Church?

It may seem hopeless for a dead church to be revived. Yet, Jesus Christ can do this. Jesus Christ, the head of the church, can restore a church to new life. How can we have this confidence? It's because of the description that He gives of Himself.

First, Jesus is the One who has "the seven Spirits of God" (**3:1**). Jesus' gift to the church is the Holy Spirit. He gives the Spirit of God to the church in order to establish, sustain, and revive the church. There are not seven Spirits of God. The word "seven" refers to completeness, fullness. Jesus reveals the Holy Spirit has complete power to do this work for the church. That is the reason we can pray and hope for revival! Jesus, by the fullness of the Holy Spirit's power, can revive and stir the dead church.

Second, Jesus has "the seven stars" (**3:1**). We saw that the stars of the churches are the pastors of the churches (**1:20, 2:1**). He holds them in His right hand. In this context, Jesus teaches us that He has authority over the church. He is the Head of the church. He is the One responsible for its sustaining and enduring. This is a powerful reminder that the church must look to Christ. He is the One who has established the church. He is the One who sustains the church. He is the One who renews the church. This is why we can pray and trust God for genuine revival.

### Is There Hope For A Dead Church?

The answer is "Yes!" I hope you can see that through these verses. There is hope for the dead church. It all boils down to one word, one name, "Jesus." Jesus loves His church. Jesus knows His church (**3:1**). Jesus warns His church (**3:1, 3**). Jesus sees and knows who is faithful to Him (**3:4**). Jesus makes

precious promises to His church (3:5). Jesus has the power and authority to revive His church (3:1). There is hope; don't give up; don't quit! Fix your focus on Jesus Christ. Seek Him and trust in Him to do the work that only He can do.

### **How Can I Use This Passage In My Praying?**

The following are some suggestions on how you can use this text to fuel your prayer life.

#### **Adoration**

- Adore Jesus for His love, zeal, and mercy for the church.
- Adore Him for the reviving, sustaining power of His Spirit.
- Praise Him for His authority over the church.
- Adore Him for His warnings and His promises to the church – both reveal His love!
- Adore Jesus for His past blessings on the church and His future purpose for the church.

#### **Confession**

The following are questions that come from this text. We can use these questions to examine our own hearts and lives. As you meditate on these, ask the Spirit of God to convict you. As He convicts, confess it to your Father, pleading the blood of Jesus.

- Have I become spiritually lazy?
- Am I content with what I have done for the Lord instead of pressing on to serve Him in the present?
- Am I holding fast to God's Word?
- Am I confessing Christ in my daily life in the culture that God has placed me?
- Have I made peace with particular sins in my life? What sins do I cherish that the world cherishes?

#### **Thanksgiving**

- Thank God for Christ, the wise and loving Head of the church.
- Thank God for the reviving sustaining power of the Spirit of God.
- Thank God that He has authority over the church – the right to govern, guide, and renew the church.
- Thank God for the love and mercy that Christ has for His church – even when it is spiritually dead.
- Thank God for acknowledging the faithfulness of His people (3:4). He knows those who are faithful to Him.
- Thank God for the hope that every church has because of Jesus Christ, its Head.

#### **Petitions**

- Ask that the Spirit of God will renew and stir your faith and walk with the Lord.
- Pray that you will be sensitive to your spiritual condition.
- Plead that you will hold fast to God's Word.
- Ask for God's strength to resist the temptations of sin that the culture revels in and enjoys.
- Pray that God will enable you to confess Christ in your daily life in the culture you live.
- Plead for the power to press forward with Christ and not to be content with what you have done for Him in the past.

### **Praying This Text For Your Church**

Father, I plead that my church will be sensitive to its spiritual condition. Deliver us from being deceived. Grant us life and power, O God; set us free from simply having a name.

Father, I pray that Jesus will stir and renew my church by the power of the Holy Spirit. Grant a fresh and deep work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Father, I ask that my church will not be content with our labors and Your blessing in the past. I plead in the name of Jesus that we will press forward in faith and zeal to serve You.

Father, I pray that You will create in us a fresh hunger for Your Word. O God, I plead that Your Word will be our delight. I ask that we will cherish, crave, and consume Your holy Word.

Father, I ask in Jesus' name that my church will stand firm in this evil culture around us. Give us strength and discernment to live pure, holy lives. Deliver us from staining our testimony with the sin of the culture.

Father, I plead that my church will be a light to the world around us. Enable us to live godly lives in this society. Deliver us from blending into the culture – from having our garments stained by the sin of the world.

Father, I pray that my church will confess Jesus Christ to the culture around us. I plead that we will make Christ and His Word known to this area. Help us to bear the offense of the Cross and not to shrink back from sharing Jesus Christ.

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Father, I plead that my church will be faithful to You. I ask that we will hold fast to Christ and His Word. I pray that we will overcome by the blood of Jesus and by our confession of Jesus Christ.

### **Prayer Closet News**

As we begin 2017, we start our nineteenth year of ministry at The Prayer Closet. We are profoundly grateful to the Lord for His sustaining power and blessing. This ministry is for Him and His glory. When we started nineteen years ago, our goal was to bring glory to God through this ministry. That remains our goal even to this day.

I'm also thankful for all of you. I appreciate your willingness to read and use our newsletter. I'm grateful for churches and believers using our materials in their individual and corporate prayers lives. From the beginning of this ministry, the driving purpose of this ministry is to strengthen and equip believers and churches in prayer. We continue to labor in pursuit of this purpose.

I would ask you to continue to pray for us. We need your prayers. I'm deeply grateful for your prayers. I know that God has honored those prayers throughout these nineteen years. I can't thank you enough for standing with us in prayer. Please continue to do so.

I would also ask you to consider prayerfully giving to this ministry. When this ministry began nineteen years ago, all I had was a burden and a vision. God's people have been so gracious to come alongside of us and give to start and continue this ministry. Your gifts go to ministry and they are making a difference across the world. Please prayerfully consider giving to this ministry.

At this time, we are also in need of volunteers. We need people who can help in a variety of ways – the preparation of the newsletter for mailing, the production of prayer rings and materials, and the preparation of mailings. We are planning to have workdays in the future when we do these things. We are going to compile a list of volunteers that we can contact about these workdays. It's an opportunity to advance the kingdom and make a difference in the lives of people. If you live in this area and would be interested in volunteering, would you please let us know? You can contact us through avenues listed below in this newsletter. God bless you richly!

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