

Date: 9.5.21
 Text: Revelation 3:1-6
 Title: #wakeup!
 Place: Sunday @ 6
 File: Revelation 3a
 Preacher: Stephen Taylor

Slide 1

In 1674 Margaret Halco married a Scottish Presbyterian minister by the name of Rev Henry Erskine. Unfortunately the marriage didn't last all that long for a year or two later she died and Henry was devastated. He did something a bit unusual in those days he buried her with her jewelry, including a valuable ring on her finger. Now this temptation proved too great for the funeral director who saw the ring on her finger and came up with a cunning plan.

After the funeral service and the burial, the funeral director dug up the casket, removed the lid and proceeded to take all the jewelry. However, the ring was stuck on Margaret's finger. So he took a knife to cut the finger off and as he tried to do that Margaret woke up! She had not really been dead at all just in a deep coma. The funeral director got such a fright he made a run for it which meant that Margaret had to make her own way back to her house. To which the person who opened the door fainted at the sight of a dead person knocking!

The postscript to this story was that Margaret made a full recovery and actually had two children who were both Presbyterian ministers whom God used to send revival to the Scottish Church! You see Margaret looked dead but she was actually alive. And when we come to the letter to the Church of Sardis it looked alive but was actually spiritually dead.

Slide 2

1. Reputation of Life (verse 1)

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

Now this is the fifth of seven letters to the Church of Asia. All drafted by the one who said *"I am the resurrection and the life."* They have all been put together by Jesus who once was dead but has come alive again. And here he is holding the seven stars in his hands. In his grasp are all the Churches so he knows which ones have a pulse and which ones are dead! He has with him the seven spirits of God, the part of God that gives a Church life & vitality. Jesus speaks to this church at Sardis & points out they have a reputation of life.

Slide 3

Now really most churches look like they are alive, don't they? They have services on a Sunday. Run programmes during the week. Have committees and meetings and plans and budgets. Some have lots of people who come to them each week and who greatly enjoy being a part of their Church community. But not Churches are alive!

Slide 4

They are like a movie set, where they build the shopfront to look like its real but it has nothing behind it. There is no substance. Sardis looked like a church full of life but Jesus said, that is not true at all! You are dead! But the irony is they don't realise they are dead!

Slide 5

2. Reality of Death. (Verses 1-2)

"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ²Wake up!"

Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God." The Church of Sardis was doing plenty of things. Yes there is lots of activity. They look alive, remember. But under the microscope of divine scrutiny and under the unblinking gaze of the Christ, their best works are found incomplete. So they were busy but they had little to show for it. They were active but fruitless.

Now I wonder would Christ say that about us here at Sunday @ 6. We have our band and our music, our Bible studies and our social events, we have plenty of things happening but that doesn't mean we are growing spiritually, that doesn't even mean we are alive spiritually. Are we putting on a façade where we look like we have it all together but if anyone was to look beyond the façade, beyond that smile, beyond that Bible Study they would find we are not growing in our faith, we are not trusting God, we are not reaching out to our community, we are not putting our faith into action?

Slide 6

I hope not. But it also works for us as individuals as well. Are we just putting on a show with our Christian life? Because we were brought up in Church and so got into the habit of coming. Have we taken our parent's faith yet and made it our own? Are we growing in our faith? Are we reaching out to the lost? Caring for those who are struggling? Actively relying on the Lord of life? We may look alive but are we really dead?

Now it is interesting that in Sardis there is no hint of opposition from the Romans or the Jews. Which is unusual. Because just down the road at all the other Churches there is plenty of that. And there is not a whiff of false teaching or compromise. And maybe that is because Satan doesn't have to pull out the big guns. Sardis is no threat at all to him. As someone once said, *"There is no trouble in a graveyard."*

Slide 7

But the truth is every Church has a life cycle. Dr Vance Havner used to say all churches go through four stages "A man, a movement, a machine and then a monument." And we have been fortunate over the last 25 years here at our Church we have shown definite signs of life but to continue to do that we need your help. We need young people's energy and ideas. We need you to capture again a vision of what the Church is doing and what it could do. In the last decade or so we have lost most our younger people once they left uni. What can we do now that will help us keep them and keep the momentum when those who are in high school at the moment dry up, which might only be in a couple of years!

Slide 8

3. Remnant of Christ's Church.

But it is not all doom and gloom. There is some life in the body at Sardis. ⁴*"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy."* So what are they to do to perform spiritual CPR on their Church? To breathe new life into a comatose congregation? Jesus says they can do 5 things. Slide 9

- *"Wake up!"* (verse 2) Wake up. Let the Spirit of God breath new life into the valley of dry bones! Don't just let the Church drift into never, never land. The time is short. Jesus will come like a thief in the night. Get going yourself and shake the people around you and remind them of how urgent the task really is. And then what?
- *"Strengthen what remains."* (verse 2) There will probably be some good things happening, so move them up to the next level. Add some life. Maybe they can fan the

embers of the church back into flame.

- “Remember what you have heard and received.” (Verse 3) Go back to the teachings that caused life in the first place. Bring to mind the blessings of the past. But don’t just live in the past. Don’t just hanker for the good ole days.
- “Hold it fast!” (verse 3). Keep it again. Obey it. Put what the Scriptures say into practice. Believe that God can do what he did in the past again in the present and into the future.
- And lastly “Repent!” (verse 3). Fix things up. Admit your mistakes to God. Look to his grace, his forgiveness, his help. A car will not just do a U turn by itself. It needs a driver to take control of the wheel. Seek to help the Church do its very own U turn. Model that repentance yourself. Be a part of the solution rather than just point out the problem.

Slide 10

There is always hope for the church. When it goes back to proclaiming Christ, preaching the Word, building one another up in faith & reaching out to the lost a Church life can return. That is also what happened to this Church. I believe in the late nineties our Church was really struggling and then a young minister named Kirk Patson came and God used him to turn things around. And that was the start of a period of growth for us here.

Slide 11

But remember it is not our Church but the Church of the Lord Jesus. He is the one who is victorious & so he is the one who can change things around. *“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. ⁶Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Jesus is the one who can wake us up. Jesus is the one will strength what remains. Jesus is the one who started us off in the first place, so if we repent and believe in Jesus and hold fast unto him, Jesus is the one who can give us life again. And Jesus promises to do that to his Church. But not necessarily to our Church.

The Church of Sardis is no more. They didn’t heed the message of this letter. And there are plenty of churches in Newcastle that shut up shop and are now cafes or restaurants even night clubs. There is no guarantee that our Church will survive. The Presbyterian church in Scotland was at one time the envy of most of the world but it currently is a basket case. And in our own nation it is not the Presbyterians that are on the forefront of Church growth it is Anglicans, or the Evangelical churches or the Pentecostals.

Slide 12

But looks can be deceiving. Not all big Churches are alive. Some like Sardis have the reputation of life but the reality of death. But God always raises up a remnant of his people. What if that was to be you and me? Tasked for the rest of our life to wake up the Church. What if our call is to preach the gospel in Charlestown and throughout the world. To jump start a movement that would change our nation for Christ.

You might not see this in me today but that is why I am in the ministry. Thirty years ago I saw the writing on the wall for the Church and especially the Presbyterian Church. And I thought to myself do I stay in accountancy and just watch the car crash happen or do I try and take the Church to the emergency ward to get new life breathed into it? And I thought to myself, there is nothing more important in my life than to give myself fully to the work of

God. So I put up my hand. I believed so much in what God was doing amongst his people that I would spend my entire working life being a part of it.

Slide 13

Now I am not saying all of us should do that. But I am saying some of you should. Be ministers. Missionaries. Youth workers. Evangelists. SRE teachers. But more than that. Elders. Sunday School teachers. Christian teachers. Christian marketers. Christian nurses. Christian mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. Friends Jesus is coming back. Soon. Be found working for him. Holding on to him. And he promises he will never blot your name out of the book of life. He promises he will acknowledge you when he comes again.