

**GOD'S WORD TO THE LAZARUS CHURCH:  
WAKE UP! AND LIVE!  
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REV 3:1 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. <sup>2</sup>Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. KJV

REV 3:1 "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. <sup>2</sup>Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. NIV

I call the church in Sardis "The Lazarus Church" because it was a 'dead' church. Lazarus had been dead for four days, which was considered by Jesus the appropriate amount of time for the people to believe that a miracle truly had happened when this friend of Jesus was called by Jesus to come out of the cave of the dead.

The Church in Sardis, 'The Lazarus Church,' had been dead much longer, as Jesus tells John, His messenger. Jesus spares no words to His churches. He is unwilling to tell this church what the world thinks about it, but tells them what He thinks about it. There is a difference between having a reputation in the world and having the approval of Jesus Christ. Many have a reputation for goodness who are not good. Many have the reputation of greatness and are not great. Many have the praise of mankind heaped upon them, but the God of heaven knows their heart and knows how weak, and sinful, and powerless they really are. Jesus says to the Church of Sardis: 3:1 "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.

To get some idea of why Jesus said what He said, let us look at the City of Sardis. William Barclay quotes another scholar who said that Sardis was “a melancholy contrast between past splendours and present decay.” Seven hundred years before this Letter, Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world, and head of the Lydian Empire. Croesus, the great King, ruled in Sardis. The early city was built on Mt. Tmolus, and was practically impregnable to attack, although later another city was built at the base of the mountain. So Sardis was one city in two locations.

King Croesus was known for his wealth; and the city of Sardis had been an exceptionally wealthy city. The city was at the center of five trade routes, and all the other seven cities traded there. In fact, it seemed that nature added her part, for the River Pactolus, which ran through the city, brought gold nuggets from the mountains into the city. In fact, as Barclay writes, “Sardis was the place where modern money was born.” That was true, for the coins of the ancient world were first stamped there.

Sardis had it all. But they forgot the two great truths: Vigilance is the price of liberty; and wealth is not permanent. Mountains cannot save you; and riches cannot keep you. Croesus crossed the Halys River and was defeated by Cyrus the Great and driven back to the city. (It is interesting that the Philosopher Thales, who was born in Sardis, the first real philosopher according to Aristotle, devised a way to cross the Halys River by dividing the stream into two streams. It is also interesting that Croesus had a prophecy that by crossing the river a great empire would be destroyed, not knowing that the prophecy was of his empire.) The Persians surrounded the city for 14 days but could not get to the mountains summit. Cyrus offered his soldiers a great reward if they could find a way to scale the mountain, and one soldier, Hyeroeades, saw the Lydian soldier at the top of Mt. Tmolus, lose his helmet that came tumbling down the side of the cliff. The Lydian made his way down and picked it up, and climbed back up. Hyeroeades noted the way he went up and led a band of Persian troops to the top. The city was unguarded, so sure were the Lydians it could not be scaled. In their ease with their lack of vigilance they were destroyed.

Later the Syrian Antiochus took the city the same way, finding it unguarded once the mountain was scaled.

In A.D. 17 a great earthquake destroyed the city, and Emperor Tiberius remitted Sardis taxes for five years, and contributed nearly one half million dollars for its restoration. At the time of this Letter, the city was wealthy again as a result of the garment industry, we are told. One writer says: 3:1. Sardis, the ancient capital of the rich and powerful kingdom of Lydia, was located about 30 miles south of Thyatira. The name may mean “Escaping.” As the glory of the city of Sardis was mostly in the past, so the church there was now virtually **dead** in spirit and works, and is representative of dead orthodoxy.

Under the Romans, Sardis never gained its former status; but it still had a “reputation.”

**I. THE LAZARUS CHURCH IN A RICH CITY.** Sardis had the reputation for being an ‘alive’ Church, but the Lord of the Church said, “You’re a ‘dead’ church!”

**A. THEIR REPUTATION CAME FROM THE WORLD AROUND THEM.**

Jesus told them that they had a Reputation. You can have a reputation, but your reputation is not who you are. I know some sports people who live on their former reputation. They always think about their glory days when they were between 16 and 20 years of age and were the star players of their basketball or football teams. From time to time I enjoy talking to some of them. They remember the games they played as if they were yesterday. When they talk about those glory days, you can see the beam and the glow of youth in their faces. But, ah, we cannot live on past glory.

Sardis was much like such former athletes. They tried to live on their reputation of those glory days, when they conquered everything; when the Lydian Empire was at its height; when gold literally flowed through their city; when they were unconquerable.

They had a reputation. But their reputation came from the wrong source. There is a real difference between reputation and reality. Time conquers all. In youth greatness can be celebrated. But there is something wrong, something sadly wrong, when life consists of what happened in the past. Someone once said, “Our reputation is what others think of us; who we truly are is what God knows about us.” I came upon this illustration:

“An Arabian princess was once presented by her teacher with an ivory box, not to be opened until a year had passed. The time, impatiently waited for, came at last, and with trembling haste she unlocked the treasure; and behold--on the satin linings lay a shroud of rust; the form of something beautiful, but the beauty gone. A slip of parchment contained these words: "Dear pupil, learn a lesson in your life. This trinket, when enclosed, had upon it only a spot of rust; by neglect it has become the useless thing you now behold, only a blot on its pure surroundings. So a little stain on your character will, by inattention and neglect, mar a bright and useful life, and in time leave only the dark shadow of what might have been. Place herein a jewel of gold, and after many years you will find it still as sparkling as ever. So with yourself; treasure up only the pure, the good, and you will be an ornament to society, and a source of true pleasure to yourself and your friends."

Time ultimately conquers all, including our reputations.

**B. OTHERS THOUGHT SARDIS WAS STILL GREAT, THOUGHT THE CHURCH WAS GREAT, BUT CHRIST KNEW ALL ABOUT THEM.** There was no reputation with Him. So the Living Christ says to the Lazarus Church in Sardis—  
“Wake up! And Live!”

What should matter to each of us is not what others think, but what our Living Lord Jesus Christ says. To this church in Sardis, He said, “Wake up! And Live!” Does He not say the same to our church? Are His words to Sardis alone? Of course not. Christ desires that every church is surrendered to the Holy Spirit, lives in the Spirit, moves to the promptings of the Spirit, sings in the Spirit, preaches in the Spirit, and lives

by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, (Eph 5:18 KJV) And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; (Eph 5:19 KJV) Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (Eph 5:20 KJV) Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; (Eph 5:21 KJV) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Our entire Christian existence, as a church, as individual members of the Body of Christ is to live in the Spirit of God. Listen: (Rom 8:8 KJV) So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:9 KJV) But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

(Rom 8:10 KJV) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (Rom 8:11 KJV) But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. (Rom 8:12 KJV) Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. (Rom 8:13 KJV) For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Rom 8:14 KJV) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

When we worship God, let us wake up and live! Let us be filled with the Spirit of God. Let us speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, giving Him thanks always for all things, and submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of God. Let us Live! Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly."

The church in Sardis was dead with a reputation for being alive. Maybe they were alive to their heathen world, but they were 'dead' to life and to God.

## **II. SO, AS YOU WOULD EXPECT, CHRIST WANTS TO CALL HIS LAZARUS CHURCH FROM ITS TOMB TO LIFE.**

But the church must do something about its reality and quit trying to live on its reputation. They need to do three things: to wake up; to remember; and to repent! Here we have it in Christ's own words: <sup>2</sup>Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

**A. WAKE UP!** A Good illustration of an individual waking up was when the Prodigal Son came to himself and decided to go back to his father's house. A lost person starts waking up when he realizes that this world can offer nothing but surface pleasures and shallow honors and death. Listen to this poem by A.E. Housman.

## TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG

THE TIME you won your town the race  
We chaired you through the market-place;  
Man and boy stood cheering by,  
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,  
Shoulder-high we bring you home,  
And set you at your threshold down,  
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away  
From fields where glory does not stay  
And early though the laurel grows  
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut  
Cannot see the record cut,  
And silence sounds no worse than cheers  
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout  
Of lads that wore their honours out,  
Runners whom renown outran  
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,  
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,  
And hold to the low lintel up  
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.

When a sinner wakes up and realizes how shallow life truly is, how terribly vulnerable life truly is, apart from love of family and love of God, his life will change. He will repent and turn to God. The world's honors mean nothing. To love God, neighbor, and our precious families means everything.

A church should not be made up of the dead but of the living. Sadly, however, churches also backslide from the Lord. They lose their first Love, so they must be accounted to Christ as 'dead.'

Barclay and the other scholars are probably correct in assuming that all the people of Sardis, including the Church there, were aware of the fact that their lack of watchfulness had caused the city to be taken in combat twice—first by Cyrus, and then by Antiochus. Wake up! Realize that you have enemies! Realize that the greatest enemy of man is just waiting to floor you, and if possible ruin everything that you have lived for and worked for. We are to Wake Up and realize that reputation cannot save us.

Life consists of more than mere reputation, to be sure, but there is such a thing as looking back. We are to wake up and:

**B. REMEMBER.** What are we to remember? We are surely to remember the Gospel of our Salvation. A dying church, indeed, a dead church, must hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Just as Christ told the church at Ephesus: (Rev 2:5 KJV) Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. So he says to the Sardis Church: <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.

(2 Tim 2:11 KJV) It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

(2 Tim 2:12 KJV) If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

(2 Tim 2:13 KJV) If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

(2 Tim 2:14 KJV) Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

(2 Pet 1:5 KJV) And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

(2 Pet 1:6 KJV) And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

(2 Pet 1:7 KJV) And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

(2 Pet 1:8 KJV) For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Pet 1:9 KJV) But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

This very thing had happened to the church at Sardis. They weren't watching. They refused to remember. The verse in this section of Scripture to the Church at Sardis means not only remember, but keep on remembering. Presently, they are a dead church, and the Christ who called Lazarus from his tomb is calling this Lazarus Church back from it deadness.

**C. THE THIRD CRUCIAL THING JESUS TELLS THE CHURCH AT SARDIS IS, REPENT!**

Remember first! Second, ask God's forgiveness! Third, do something about it! Christ says, in effect, "Remember my Word and be obedient to it."

In the public schools of Switzerland each student is taught this patriotic slogan: "My duty is to obey and work for God and my native land." The real point in this slogan is the fact that God is placed first in the matter of obedience. Our duty to our native land will be properly fulfilled only when we first render obedience to God.

--The above illustration is from Best Sermon Illustrations by J. G. Lawson.

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). One of America's greatest preacher, Phillips Brooks, said of this verse, "Sometimes He seems to gather up His fullest declaration of this vital connection of man with God and call it in one mighty word, Obedience. You must obey God, and so live by Him."

--Phillips Brooks

A teacher was explaining to her class the words concerning God's angels which called them "ministers of His who do His pleasure." She asked, "How do angels carry out God's will?" Many answers followed. One said, "They do it directly." Another said, "They do it with all their hearts." A third said, "They do it well." And after a pause, a little girl added, "They do it without asking any questions."

--From Best Sermon Illustrations by J. G. Lawson

The most important way, and the only way, we can show our repentance and our faith is by doing God's will. Abraham went out immediately after God told him to go. He offered up his son Isaac without asking why. He journeyed from his homeland without saying goodbye. He simply trusted! He simply obeyed!

### **III. THE RESURRECTION OF THE LAZARUS CHURCH MUST TAKE PLACE THE SAME WAY THAT THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS TOOK PLACE.**

It takes the power of the Living Christ to give life to a dead friend or to His dead and dying church. To be sure, there was a little still alive in the Lazarus church. Some there were had not soiled their garments at all. (Barclay says 'soiled garments' alludes to the garment industry in Sardis.) Needless to say, however, these were not enough. The church needed a Resurrection, an infusion of the Spirit like that on the day of Pentecost, an infusion of life like that which the dead body of Lazarus experienced, an infusion of life like that about which Ezekiel spoke when he preached to all those dry bones in the valley of death.

Sardis needed a Resurrection! Praise God, many thousands of our American churches have reputations but are dead and dying, and they need Resurrection, and Glory to God, a Resurrection awaits them. But they must be watchful and awake; they must remember; they must repent; and they must be obedient to the Living Christ. You remember this story I am sure. But it bears retelling.

D.L. Moody tells us a remarkable incident in connection with an early visit to London. He had gone there for a visit. He was unknown in London, hence he did not expect to preach; but a little while after arriving there he was invited to preach for a certain church, which he did. He described the ceremony as a very cold and uninteresting service to him, but he announced that he would preach again that night.

Upon reaching the church, he noticed that the atmosphere had changed, he did not know just why. At the close of the meeting he was led to give an invitation for those who wanted to be saved to stand. A great crowd of people stood. He left the next day for Dublin, Ireland. Shortly after arriving there he received a telegram from the church to return, stating that the whole community was in an upsurge and clamor for a series of meetings. He went back and found that a great revival was beginning, and hundreds of people were being converted.

Not long after he learned the secret. An invalid lady, who could not attend the church, was praying for a mighty outpouring of the Spirit upon the church. She prayed for months. Once she saw in the papers' accounts of some of the Moody meetings in America, and, although she had never heard of Mr. Moody before, she began to pray that God would send him to her church in London for a revival. One Sunday morning her sister, upon her return from the service, informed her of Moody's presence and his preaching, whereupon she spent the whole afternoon in prayer that God would make that night a night of power. That explains the difference between morning and evening services!

Moody says, "Oh, I tell you what we need in the churches is praying members! Oh, if we could find even one who would thus resolve to pray to God for salvation and power to come upon the church. This is the need of today--importunate prayer, like the Syro-Phoenician woman's "Lord, help! Lord, help!" (Matt. 15:22-28)."

A resurrected church will wear white garments. Barclay says they have four meanings: 1. Festivity—white symbolized happiness and rejoicing; 2. Roman triumph—when a triumphant leader marched into Rome, the people all wore white clothing to symbolize that triumph; 3. White always symbolized in all cultures, purity; 4. White symbolized also resurrection bodies that would shine in the firmament with Christ.

I want to wear that white, unsoiled, robe. I want to be like Jesus.

A resurrected church will also be a church whose members are not blotted out of the Book of Life. In the ancient world, when a man committed a crime against the state, his name was erased from the role of citizen; and when a man died, his name was blotted off the role. Thank God, there is a Book of Life! May the members of Caney Baptist Church all be written thereon. May our lives also be lived in the spotless holiness of the Son of God, as we repent and obey His Word. Amen!