

The Church of Sardis

by Brent Williamson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, revival, and staying close to God. It warns against becoming complacent, prayerless, and blinded to spiritual realities. The message encourages believers to overcome spiritual deadness, test the spirits, and remain faithful to Christ despite the temptations of a dying culture and church. It calls for a return to fervent prayer, weeping for the lost, and a deep commitment to following Jesus.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:1, Romans 11:4, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Psalms 18:39, Matthew 26:41, Revelation 3:1, Isaiah 59:2

Topics: "Importance of Prayer", "Spiritual Vigilance"

Description

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Transcript

I was talking to Brother Gary this week about his first message and I said, how are you doing? He said, I'm all right. I looked at his wife, I said, how's he doing? Oh, he's really nervous. You know, he wouldn't say that.

And I've been praying for him. And I was obviously, Pastor Mark mentioned, I remember mine, 24 years old in a nursing home was my first sermon. They asked me to speak at a church that we were attending that we did like six nursing homes.

And then the guy that headed it all up asked me and I about fainted when he asked me to speak. I literally took an entire month to prepare for that. And you would think, you know how I'm known for long-winded, I only spoke for 15 minutes.

And some of you are thinking, where did that go? Where did that go? Bring it back, Lord, bring it back. Bring that 15 minutes back now. Brother Brent, your introduction's 15 minutes.

But it was a blessing back then. So just continue to remember Juan. I know we've been praying for him.

A lot of people don't know. You know, Juan actually died twice when he was born. They had to resuscitate him.

You know, so he's gone through a lot. And I was thinking yesterday, that's one man that's probably, you and I will not be able to see him in heaven because he's gonna be so close to the throne of God. I mean, that boy there is precious, amen.

Sardis Revelation, chapter three. In 22 years of preaching, you know, I've, there's some, Pastor Mark, Earl, and Patty, you know, you can remember certain messages that really stand out. And as I was preparing this week for this message, for me, it's probably gonna be one of the most important messages I've ever preached in 22 years.

And it may be even the most important message I ever preached for the rest of my entire life. Now the difficulty with that, and the concern I have with it, I articulate, can I get it out the way that God gave it to me? Okay, that's what my concern was preparing this. So God, I've got the message, but can I deliver my soul in the way that you want it to be delivered? And to say the things I need to say in the way you want them to be said, that's totally different.

But in Sardis, the church in Sardis, you know, as I was talking to my wife about a week ago, and you know, we've been going through this Revelation series, and we've been listening to the series, and the messages have been strong, amen? I mean, they're not candy-coated, they're not milky, they're strong, and I told my wife, I said, after this series, my wife and I were talking in the kitchen, I said, the church is probably hoping, hey, can you guys preach some messages of hope here in the near future? And I told her, I said, after I said that to her, I thought, uh-oh, you know what? She said, what? I said, I'm preaching on Sardis this Sunday. She said, yeah? I said, yeah, because they said the church is dead. And she goes, oh.

And there goes the message of hope. So, Revelation chapter three, verses, we're gonna be reading verses one through six. You know, I look at Sardis as death knocking on the door.

It's a very strong letter, written by Jesus. It's known as what we call the dead church. Some have called it, and I think it might be a little bit better even to say it's the prayerless church.

So today, I'm just gonna, Lord willing, peel back these layers. Because when we look at the city of Sardis, and I'm not gonna go into the history like I have been in the past recent messages, because I gotta get through some things today. I don't wanna take my time on history today on Sardis.

But if you wanna know about it, you can come talk to me later on, about the history of Sardis. But there was, the only point I wanna make is about the history, is because as we look at each message that Jesus, or the letter he gave to the church, we notice that he gave, he had them understand, he met them where they're at, right? He met them where they're at. And see, Sardis, in the city of Sardis, they were protected by huge hills, natural walls, except one area in Sardis was unprotected, and that was the south side of it.

So they actually built a man-made wall on that side to protect the city. Sardis, they said in history, was attacked many times. Many times.

And it was always trying to get into the south side of the city, because that was the weak point of the city, because they couldn't overcome the huge mountains or the huge hills that protected the city. And they said in history that the city of Sardis was only captured two times, only twice. And each time that they were captured, because they had guards or watchmen on top of the walls looking out, and each time they were captured, they found out that the watchmen, i.e. the guards, fell asleep when they were captured.

Interesting how Jesus brings this all out. Because Jesus obviously knows the history of Sardis. And you know, it's one thing to be a watchman or a guard in the daylight.

It's easy to see, it's not tough. You don't have to be really aware of the surroundings that much, because everything is exposed by the light. But when it's dark out, that's when the watchmen and the guards have to be the most focused, the most attentive, the most aware, because that's when the enemy can attack very easily and subtly.

And so it is with us. As the days grow darker, we need to be more aware and more attentive to the subtlety of the attacks of the enemy. Revelation chapter three, I'm gonna be reading out of King James this morning.

Jesus says, and unto the angel of the church in Sardis, right, 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 are dead. Be watchful.

Now in the NIV, if you have that, you will read the word wake up. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. For I have not found the works before God.

I'm gonna read that again. For I have not found the works perfect before God. Verse three, remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.

If therefore thou shall not watch, notice he says watch, I will come on thee as a thief and thou shall not know what hour I will come upon you or thee. 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. 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.

I will confess his name before my father and before his angels. Verse six, he that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches. Lord, we thank you for the word of God.

It's quick, powerful, sharper than any two edged sword. And so father this morning, as we have gathered together in your name, it's a glorious thing to think that we've gathered here together in the name of Jesus. Pray that your word, not what I say, not what I say, not my sermon, but the message of the Holy Spirit to us today will be heard.

Give us the ears to hear. If any father have calloused hearts, hardened hearts as the scripture says today, if we will hear his voice. God, we're in desperate need to hear the voice of God more than ever today because there's so many voices speaking today.

God, we need your voice. As Jesus, you declared my sheep hear my voice. And those father today that may not be a sheep, God give us ears, give them ears to hear.

We love you and I ask and pray as always that you keep me behind the cross and may you be made famous through this, exalted above everything else. We thank you for what you're gonna do for your namesake in Jesus name. And everyone said, amen.

There's been so many things I wanted to say. I mean, even last night, I thought I had this wrapped up completely 100% and I woke up in the middle of the night, which I wish I didn't. And things, you know how it is, brother Earl, things just start flooding in my mind.

I woke up, I was like, oh no, I gotta write that down. And I just couldn't write fast enough. You know, when you're asleep and the Holy Spirit's speaking to you, you're in bed asleep and things are rolling, you know it's from above.

And so I just started writing and then I laid awake for two hours thinking about what I wrote. So I was a little sleepy. So Sardis, you know, they, at this time, they were 700 years old, at least in the city.

It was 30 miles south of Thyatira. And the same thing as the most of all the other churches and the other cities that we just read about in the last few weeks, you know, they had their false gods, the temple of Diana was there. But the strength of the false gods, the intensity of the false gods was not like in Pergamos or, you know, all the Ephesus.

It was there, but it wasn't the intensity of the other cities. But it was still there. And like I said, I'm not gonna get into the very details of Sardis.

I don't wanna spend a lot of time in that. There's so many other important matters I need to get across. So this is a very serious, dire situation.

You know, Jesus is giving them a very, very strong, strong reproof of what is happening. Very strong. I mean, right out of the gate, he said, you're dead.

I mean, there is no commendation. Matter of fact, there was only a couple of churches out of the seven that there's no commendation. And this is one of them.

You know, I think really, as one man says, Pastor Mark's gonna clear it all up at the very end with the Laodicea Church. I mean, it's just like a pyramid we're building into the Laodicean Church. But I really believe the two most important messages is this one and then the Laodicean Church, is my belief, at least.

But this is a very severe reproof. You know, the angel of the church receives it, looks at it. I mean, immediately Jesus said, you're dead.

What did Jesus say? Oh, we're dead. Or what? And that would be their reaction. What? We're dead? What are you talking about? Keep listening.

So, but he goes on, he begins to talk about how he has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. And I'm not gonna get into all the details of that even right now, because that can take us off to another rabbit hole. But simply meaning that the seven spirits of God, that he says, basically, listen, I've got the power.

You need the Holy Spirit because you don't have it. And I've got the manifestation of the spirit of God rested upon me. I am the holder of the seven stars, represents the churches.

So in other words, I have the power, when he begins talking to them, I have the power to restore you, recitate you, or revive you. I know I messed up on that word, didn't I, Gabby? She's laughing at me. It's all good.

I just know, when I messed up, I just looked at her. Recitate. Thank you.

Send me to grammar school past Mark because every time I make stuff on posts on social media, she's always going, oh, your grammar's killing me. But as we've read and we've studied the messages, Jesus is not politically correct. That's one of the things we've noticed, haven't we? Here we are in the fifth church

today of studying, and he's never politically correct.

He don't have what we call good bedside manners. He's straightforward. Sardis was a city in decline.

I want you to get that. The Sardis was a city in decline. They themselves, the culture, was dying.

But the tragedy of that is that the church in Sardis was also, too, dying. That's great tragedy because not only what we're saying, because simply what that means for us, that they couldn't even handle their own situations in their own body, and they're supposed to be the Holy Ghost hospital to help everyone else, but they couldn't resolve their own issues, let alone the culture around them, because they were also dying or dead. Great tragedy.

And something that's astonishing that Jesus says here, when he declares that they are dead, you know, it's one thing to say that you're dead. I mean, when I think of dead church, now, for me personally, I think every one of us have, if I asked you personally today, I'll ask you, what is a dead church to you? If I asked you that, you have an image, you have some thoughts, you know, this, this, this. For me personally, a dead church is a seating capacity of 200 seats and only about five members in them, and a little 80-year-old lady playing the organ.

That's just my image of what a dead church. Now, we've got our own images. Church declined and just a few people left.

But so the astonishing thing here is that Jesus declares that they are dead, but he says, but you're known to be alive. And the word alive, many of you in your translations actually says reputation. In other words, you're known, you are, you have a reputation in the community that you are alive and well.

That's astonishing. I wanna, I'm saying that slowly. I want that to sink in.

Everyone else thinks you're on fire. That's crazy to say, you've got a reputation. And that's why I said at the very beginning of this, when I was talking about this, when they get the letter and Jesus says to them, sends it to the messenger, shares it with the church, and he says, we're dead.

And they would literally think to themselves, what, we're dead? We've got all this going on. How are we dead? How are we dead? He says, but if you look up the word reputation, it actually means you're famous, or you're advertised as, or you're known to be as. You're well-known for, Jesus says, but you're someone different inside.

You're recognized as to be alive. Your Christian friends think you're alive. And you're well, you're healthy as a Christian.

But Jesus says, you're dead. And you can't, that's tough language, isn't it? Strong words. See, they had the external life going on, but their internal life wasn't going on.

They had a name, Christian, above their head. And we can have a name, Christian, above a church building, a church ministry, or a school, but you could be dead, just because you carry the name. They carried a name on the outside, but not on the inside.

See, Jesus no longer, in this church, was the star attraction for these people. They were on what we call church life supports. They were on life supports.

And you know, when you think about this for a moment, when you think that when Jesus is telling them that they're dead, and they get this letter, let me tell you something. This is even the scarier thing. This wasn't the first time they heard a warning from Jesus.

Because see, Jesus loves his bride. He loves his church. He loves it.

He shed his blood for it. He died for it. He gave everything for it.

It's the bride of Christ. You think all of a sudden, he's just gonna let them go away? That's not love, is it? You're not gonna let your daughter or your son just fade away and just say, go on? And all of a sudden, at the point of death, oh, I'm sorry, it's too late now. That's not love, is it? So that's the scary thing.

They came through all the warnings. Warning after warning after warning. Jesus is knocking.

And year by year, and finally, he just says, you're now dead. You didn't listen to what I had to say. And you know, they were probably proud.

They were probably proud being known as a vibrant church in the eyes of man. They were probably proud of their hypocrisy. And they probably didn't like preachers warning them.

Because they didn't see that they were dead. See, it's a slam on Jesus. It's a bad testimony for his church that they revealed death.

They revealed death. And what Jesus wants us to reveal to the world is the resurrection power of his son. To be witnesses.

Jesus says, ye shall be witnesses. Witnesses of what? Witnesses of his power. Witnesses of his resurrection.

Witnesses of something that was and only can be something supernatural, heaven sent. That's what God wants for the church of the living God. He wants something to be alive and well in him.

To walk out in the newness of life, the people of God, the world, all the sinners around, they will see us walking in the newness of life and the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what this world needs today more than ever. The tragedy, though, they claim to have this resurrection and they were dead, they were dead.

And ultimately, what the church did is resist the Holy Spirit. They resisted, because how else did they get to this point? But by resisting the Holy Spirit, they resisted it to the point of death. Now, get this, this is gonna blow you away and it backs up, because see, the false prophets in the Old Testament had some of the biggest and largest numbers in their congregants.

Now, that's to say you can have a big church and you can still have a big church and be real. A mentor of mine, many years ago, I was 25 years old, she was in her 80s, very godly woman, remember her telling me one time, we talked once a week on the phone. I remember her telling me, Brent, in today's culture, she said a true holiness church is probably gonna be small.

That was her belief, the way things were going. But here we find a church that's growing in numbers. What? Yeah, they're growing in numbers.

Or how else? They couldn't be known as alive if they were decreasing, if they were declining in numbers, you can't tell me that's a good reputation. Follow me? They were decreasing in numbers, increasing in numbers, not declining. They were known to be famous, they had a reputation of being alive.

Who in the world's gonna say to a church that's declining, you're known as being on fire. Because see, here it is. The church today in America grows, Barna Research, and it shows more and more and more all the time, we grow by musical chairs today.

And only 2% of the church's growth is by new converts. And we get so happy when we steal someone from someone else's church today. Oh, I got them.

They're known to have numbers increasing, their bank account was probably full, but their spiritual bank account was empty. It was C.H. Spurgeon that said, a church that the world loves, he said, be sure God abhors it. Strong truth, but true.

In every minister's meeting, Pastor Earl, Pastor Mark, we've all been there. I've been to so many pastor's meetings over the years, Church of God meetings, and conferences of pastors, and they get together, and they'll say, how's your church doing? Oh, we're running about 75, I didn't ask that, I didn't ask that, but that's how they reply. I'm running about 90 now.

I said, how's your church doing? Follow me? And pastors, we all know that's what goes on. We base how we do by numbers. Well, here, okay, you can't base that here.

They had a large congregation, their numbers were increasing. I think one of the questions we should be asking, how much of the operation of the Holy Spirit is moving in the church? What's the percentage of Jesus actually moving? I think the old Chinese man, I think some of us have heard now, years ago, he came and visited, Chinese Christian came to America, and he was asked, what was your thought of the American church? He said, I'm just totally amazed how much they can do without the Holy Spirit. That's true, that's a true story.

That's not sarcastical, but we have, we're boasting, people are boasting how many people they can pull from other churches today, and that's sick, really. But here's a church that's dead, so when you have a dead church, what does that mean? You're gonna have dead worship, dead preaching, or you may have great homiletical skills, you may have prayer in your church, so to speak, but the prayers are prayerless in this church. Their faith was just about almost dead, as Jesus even said.

He said there was something remaining. And Jesus was saying, your hypocrisy is fooling everyone else but me. He said, I am the searcher of the hearts.

I am the one that looks at the heart. Everyone looks at the external. It was lifeless because the Holy Ghost wasn't brooding in the nest.

Everything was operated in the flesh. Name Ichabod was above the door, the glory departed. You know this church probably, you can have a church that has a full parking lot, like I said already, great preaching, children's program, a big band playing on the stage, and yet you can be dead.

You can be dead. The preacher can even write millions of books, and he can be dead. But Jesus said you need to strengthen and to be watchful again.

So the question I had, and I think some of us may have, what made them a dead church? That's a good question. What made them get to this point? And it's not something, you know, big word. It's not even big words.

It's just they quit praying. They quit praying. I keep listening.

No, no, I'm sure they said their prayers. I'm sure they prayed, but the prayers were prayerless. They were in vain.

And what do I mean? There was no more tears for the lost when they prayed. There was no more groaning as Lot's soul, the Bible even says his soul being in Sodom and Gomorrah was tormented. It says vexed, but it actually translates into torment.

He was tormented inside. And there was no more groaning. There was no more fasting.

There was no more tears in their prayers. They were prayerless, prayers. In Ezekiel 9, you find that when God looks for people that are after his own heart that he didn't wanna touch or for all the abominations that was going on, he says, I want you to go around and I want you to start at my sanctuary.

I want you to start at my church and I want you to put a mark in every single person that groans, that cries for the abominations that's going around. He didn't say speak in tongues, but those spoken tongues. He didn't say those who gave to the poor.

He said, those that cry and sigh for the abominations of what's going on around. He said, I want you to find those people that their souls were tormented. And the presence of God was missing in this church.

And when the presence of God begins missing and Jesus begins to pull back and you know what? He says, I'm just not comfortable here anymore. And then they could begin to substitute fleshly emotion for the presence of God. And what we gotta be careful of, and I've fallen into this years ago, we got the knowledge, we've got the knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

We know a lot of things. We know theology, we can quote, we can speak in tongues. And sometimes we measure that how spiritual we are.

Don't deceive yourself. They weren't persecuted, this church. Nobody spoke against them as we see.

There was nothing left in them that was reflecting Christ because it was dead. And they couldn't see any longer because a dead man can't, what? See. They were blinded to the truth.

Nothing was reflecting the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Their prayers have become cold. And the church, see, this church, the church of the living God, the church back here originally was birthed in prayer.

And when it's birthed in prayer, the church has got, the life of the church must continue to do everything by prayer. All the noise and all the show and all the appearance that they had was in vain. It was a show.

It was a church simply that lost the spirit of prayer. Moses himself prayed so hard and so intently that God himself cried out in Exodus. He said, let me alone.

That's good praying. When God cries out and says to you, let me alone. And this is what the church didn't have.

They weren't holding on to God like that. Like they, listen, listen, like they were. Like they were.

Like they were. Lots of activity, but their prayers were cold. And Jesus, in Matthew chapter 26, Matthew chapter 26, that's one verse there, but a quick illustration.

This is when Jesus was in the garden and he told the disciples to wait here and he goes over there to pray. And before he does that, listen, he says this to them. I want you to watch.

I want you to watch. And he goes over there to pray. And he comes back after an hour and they're sleeping.

He said, could you not watch with me for one hour? He wakes them up, jolts them. Then he goes back to pray. Hour later, comes back again.

He finds them sleeping again a second time. But this time, the Bible says he left them asleep. And he goes back to pray.

And he comes back again. So Jesus says there, they came to the disciples and he found them sleeping. Could you not watch with me one hour? And he goes on to verse 41 and says this.

Watch and pray that you enter not into temptations. So when Jesus told the church, you guys need to watch. Watching is tied in with praying.

Holiness, praying, getting a hold of God, getting a hold of the horns of the altar. See, a prayerless church is a sleeping church, sleeping. When they lost the tears for the lost, the church became a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

When they lost the tears, the groaning, and the agony for souls, they no longer had it. It became a form. And the scary thing is, is that they were satisfied with how things were going.

That's the scary thing. And John Bunyan said, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, he said, if thou art not a praying person, thou art not a Christian. I like this old time preacher.

So we find in a Sardis city that I just talked about a minute ago, that they had the guards, they had the watchmen that fell asleep and that's how they were captured. And that's exactly how this church was captured. Their watchmen, their guards fell asleep finally.

And the enemy came in, they found a door unlocked. Has anybody ever left your key inside your door accidentally when you walked into the house? I did it yesterday. And then all of a sudden you wake up in the morning, your keys are inside the door.

But I thought how many Christians or how many churches, spiritually speaking, leave our keys in the door for the enemy to open up and to come right on in. So they were sleeping. And Jesus even talked about the Pharisees at one point.

And he said, the Pharisees are even impressing the people with their praying, these long prayers. And they impress them with these great vocabulary words that I don't even have, obviously. He said, they

impress people, but he said, they're dead inside.

The average pastor today, George Barna research, and I read this years and years ago, the average pastor in the United States prays on average 10 minutes a day. I want you to hear that, 10 minutes. And I know a lot of preachers.

I know we've, thank God, we've got some preachers in this church that pray, amen. But I know a lot of preachers that pray this. 10 minutes a day.

And the average preacher spends, actually they said that most preachers today are only spending time in the scripture just to find a sermon for Sunday morning. So they're dead. When prayer, when prayer, the ministry of prayer in your life, my life, and in church becomes the weakest point, beware.

My message today, I told Pagan Pastor Mark, is a warning and encouragement. And right now I'm in the warning section. When your prayers become the, when you are not praying for the lost with cries and tears, you look around, you see death all around, the enemy just completely annihilating the whole culture.

And we don't cry and groan and sigh in our prayers. We're dead. Don't fool yourself.

They did not think they were dead. It becomes, church becomes a social, social crisis. A club, a life of hobbies.

And I want to say this, thank God if you're being troubled right now, amen. Thank God you're being troubled because that shows that the love of the Father is still working on you. He's still ministering to you.

He hasn't left you yet. See, this is a warning. And this is the warning that the church and Sardis got over and over and over, and they didn't heed to it.

You're struggling to pray. TV, smartphones, hobbies, sports, whatever it is, has attracted you more than God. Look at the prayer meetings in America today.

They're dead. They're dead. As Leonard Ravenhill said, he said, a prayer meeting shows how popular God is in the church.

And he ain't very popular today. But it's a warning, church, for you, for me, warning signs, death is knocking at your door and you don't even hear it. And when you have to argue that you don't need to be in church, listen to me, I might not be popular, but I'm just gonna preach it the way God gave it to me.

When you have to argue with yourself or with someone why you don't come to church very often when the doors are open, you're already blinded. You're already blinded. It could stink.

He said, remember, remember those times, because he said, remember, I'm getting ahead of myself, that's why I breathe heavy. But he said, remember those times when you were so vibrant for me, when you were on so fire, you wouldn't miss a day ever when those church doors ever opened. You would never miss.

He said, remember those days when you couldn't stop talking about me to other people, not caring what the hell it means, what people thought of you, remember those days? You've lost it. Now you're arguing and you had it and someone, why you had it, and someone would have told you why, because Christ lives in me. And now you miss church for an excuse that you can think of, and now you argue against the

person who tries to get you in.

And I remember David Wilkerson, not long ago, I remember him hearing him preach. He said, look at the churches. The Sunday night's crowd in America is dead.

I'm gonna pause, I'm gonna pause there and go back, okay? I'm gonna go way off my notes, I'm gonna be lost. But you find it harder and harder and harder to pray and you find it harder and harder to shed tears and you think to yourself, God, why don't I have tears for the lost? I once did. I used to weep over the lost.

I used to weep over the community. I used to weep over people who are hurting without God. And no longer you have the tears.

And you find it harder and harder to pray. And these are warning signs, church. These are warning signs that Sardis Church had.

You know what Sardis Church didn't have? A Sardis Church. And we have a Sardis Church as our example. They didn't have themselves as an example.

We can now use them as an example for the church, for warning signs. So you can speak in tongues. I've seen this so often in churches over the years.

You can speak in tongues and you allow that to be your measuring stick for how spiritual you think you are. Don't be deceived. Because even Jimmy Swaggart based that upon it, that he should continue his church.

When he fell from grace, he woke up speaking in tongues. And he thought, oh, God's still with me. That's true.

You struggle to really dive into the scriptures. And you're satisfied with being in scripture just for a few minutes a day. This is not a beat up party.

This is just to help the church to wake up before you actually officially die if you're in this place, amen? If you're not in this place right now, you say, praise God, I'm not in this place. But if you're just struggling and everything else is attracting you from the outside, death is knocking on your door and you don't even see it. And Leonard Ravenhill said, no man, this is one of his famous quotes, no man is more spiritual than his prayer life.

That's very true. Not his tongue, how much he speaks in tongues, but his prayer life. You know, follow me for a second.

In the globally right now, the deadest church globally right now, it's not America, it's England. England is a deathbed, it's a graveyard, it's a boneyard for churches. Some of the greatest historical accounts of the moves of God, revivals, top preachers in the history that we can read about were in England.

I mean, tremendous things we can read about. And the churches today are closing their doors faster than anything else. Some of the most famous churches in the revivals in history, today, the churches sit empty.

Think about that. You know where it began in England? Listen to me like you've never listened to me before. You know where it began? People stopped coming to Sunday nights, made excuses.

People stopped coming to Wednesday night, made excuses. People stopped coming to prayer meetings, made excuses. Ah, I can get through this.

Ah, I can do it. And they said all, all the way through. And the churches are closed.

If you study history like I have, and you just read, we are in the same footsteps as England right now. The writing is on the wall, but now we're not looking at it. We're dying.

Faster than 8,000 churches a year close their doors that will never open again in the United States. And only 4,000 are reopening every year. What does that tell us? In a matter of years, your children and your grandchildren are gonna be facing the Church of England.

And I'm gonna tell you why. Because we decided to make excuses. To push away the warning signs.

This is why I said this could be the one of the most important messages I've ever preached in my entire life, and I still hold to that right now. In 1 Corinthians 10, verse 12, Therefore, let him who thinks he stands, take heed, beware, be cautious, lest he fall. You think you stand, beware, don't be prideful.

We in the United States Church are on the same tracks as the England Church was. At this very point, and some of us right now, will not even heed what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. You'll continue to make excuses, and you'll wonder why you died at the end, or you wonder why you allowed certain things in in your life.

God doesn't even require warnings, but He's gracious, and He loves us enough to warn us. I don't know about you, but I don't want my grandchildren, because God's been speaking to me about this, what kind of church is it your grandchildren, or the next generation kids going to be raised in right now? I want them to be raised in Holy Ghost fire churches, but you know what? It begins with us, but it begins with us stop making excuses. Like I said, the majority of churches in the United States right now, the majority of them all, Hillsborough, Ohio, 1% I think of churches have church on Sunday nights now.

And the tragedy is, we don't think anything big of it. You know why? We've gotten used to it. We've gotten used to it, and so did the Sardis Church.

They got used to it. They got used to it. So this church in Sardis, remember I said it was vibrant, it was a vibrant church.

The Sardis Church was a vibrant, on-fire church. It was. But do you know when the world seems the brightest? It's when it's time to pray.

Amen? The world seems the brightest when it's time to pray. It was Martin Luther, the great reformist, he said, I've got so much to do today, so much more I have to pray. And it takes discipline to pray.

The enemy will fight you and I, and he does, to stop us from praying. Remember something also, is that the Sardis Church didn't die suddenly. This wasn't overnight.

This was years and years. It was a slow fade. So don't fool yourself.

I mean, the enemy, if you've got an alcohol addiction problem and you're trying to avoid it, the enemy just doesn't go, here, creeps in slowly. So in verse 3, he says, remember, therefore how thou has received and heard and hold fast and repent. Remember, in other words, think back.

He tells them this. This is astonishing, powerful remark. He says, I want you to think back for a moment.

Think back. You know, a lot of times we are not called to think back. We're called to forget our sins, right? But here Jesus tells us to think back.

We should. What he did for us on Calvary. See, there was a time in your life when Calvary was so precious to you, that Calvary, the cross of Christ, was so powerful in your life.

You realized that the wrath of God was absorbed by Jesus Christ on that cross and you realized that all your sins, your vileness and your wickedness of who you are, oh beloved, you are still wicked without Christ in you. Don't fool yourselves. And you remember, he says, I want you to remember all the things that I forgiven you of at that one point, all the things I absorbed for you and I took the wrath of God in your place.

I want you to remember that. Because he told them, you forgot it. You have forgotten what I've done for you.

Oh, you remember back when, but I want you to remember daily like it was fresh, like I just did it. The gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be repeated and gone over and over and over in our minds a lot. Remember.

Fight that you used to have inside you for me. Remember that you were willing to fight the devils and the demons and all the outcasts. You were willing to fight for me, but you've lost your fight.

You've lost it. Remember therefore, as thou received, remember hundreds of years of what the church has gone through hundreds of years of historical accounts of how the churches have gone through graveyards and they all receive warning signs just like the Sardis church had and they chose to make excuses. Oh, it can't happen here or what's happening.

It's happening. It's happening quicker than what we can actually think, really. Remember and he says there, I want you to wake up because that's a translation.

Wake up. You're almost dead, but I can preach an entire message on this while I'm getting ready to say. But quickly says here.

Verse four. After he tells them they're dead, they're mechanical, their whole life is a form you're prayerless. But verse four, thou has a few names, even in Sardis, I have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white.

Or help me to preach this. This is powerful. Remember even in Sardis, a few.

How many is a few? Who knows? I think it's very few because look at look at the story of Noah saved eight people and the whole world was corrupt. That's a few, but these few, listen to me, here's the encouragement part of the message for those of you that are the few. These few were different.

They walked alone. They didn't succumb to the voices within the church that were renaming sin in Sardis. They were renaming sin that was once sinful.

They didn't succumb to the rest of the church. They were the Noahs and the Enochs who walked with God as A. W. Tozer, I think I've quoted it here before, Enoch walked with God and Tozer said because of that,

Enoch walked alone. And these few, even in Sardis, in order to make a difference in this fallen world, you and I have to be different than the rest.

Whether that makes us an outcast or an outlaw or a heretic, you have to remember something church that the martyrs shed their blood. They weren't accused most of the time for being killed for their faith. They renamed it their heretics, enemies of the state.

So you have to go through that to allow people to falsely, listen, to falsely accuse you of things that you've never done by the church that's dead. Well, I've had all kind of people that has falsely accused me of things. Might be the same friends we have, live in an untight knit community like this.

But to make a difference in this fallen world, to be different, to be a difference maker, we have to be different. We have to be different. Think about this dead church for a moment.

The dead church left the church, and the few that remained in Sardis left the church. You didn't catch that, did you? The dead church left the original state of what the church should have been and what they were, and the few in Sardis left the dead church to remain a true church. That's what happened.

Think about this. Think about these few for a moment with me. Think about them.

In the beginning, they were all one. They were all one big church. They were all vibrant.

These few were in the mix. They were with this church. They were all vibrant together at one time.

But, hear me now, spiritually, you have to keep yourself, and I have to keep myself, listen carefully, I'm not being a heretic by saying this, you have to keep yourself disconnected in a measure from the church, but yet connected in a measure. Because Jesus said, if the blind lead the blind, what? All fall into a ditch. So you and I have to be connected in a measure, but disconnected in a measure, so we don't get in a single file line following the dead church.

And I had a close friend of mine that was a minister, I might have mentioned him before. He was a buyer, vibrant, him and I began ministry together, and he started studying some weird stuff and he got onto a track, and he had a vibrant church growing. I mean, it was just hopping.

Man, when you listened to him pray, he prayed down to heaven. And today, you can't even talk to him about church, he's lost, and he gets mad when you talk to him about trying to help him get back. A dead church encourages each other, listen, a dead church encourages each other in their sins.

They pat each other on the back, right, they do, they didn't, the Sardis church didn't die, listen to me, the Sardis church didn't die on purpose, it wasn't an intellectual decision that they made, so let's just die, no. The enemy got in to their prayer lives, and they stopped them from praying, and no longer did they have the cares that they once did for the lost sheep. See, the few, these few Sardis, they saw the shallowness of the church, they saw the shallowness of the church, they took on 1 John 4, they tested the spirits and tried the spirits, whether they were of God, for many false prophets shall arise in the last day.

Jesus told us, and I was reading that the other day, how important it is for you and I to test the spirits, he didn't say test some of the spirits, did he? That's what I caught the other day, whoa, he said, you need to test the spirits, whether they are of God, for many false prophets will arise in the last days, and Jesus said that too. These few stayed near the cross, and how increasingly, increasingly tempting it must have been

for them, for these few, to go against the false fire. You see, not only did this few in Sardis overcome the darkness, man, this was so good, because these guys were just on fire for God, they had to be on fire for God, they had to be great overcomers, so to speak, to do what they did.

Think about this for a moment, not only on one side, these few in Sardis, they had the dying culture all around them, so that was a grievance for them, right? That hurt them, but then, these few had the other side, they had a dying church on the other. One hand was the dying culture, and one hand was the dying church, and here they are, in the middle of the ball. And you know what? You get to that place, and God shows you reality, and shows you revelation of all these things, and then all of a sudden, sometimes you think mentally, am I going crazy? God and I just outcast? Am I mentally lost? You can bring condemnation and discouragement to yourself, God, am I really seeing this, when no one else sees it? Some of you see it, some of you are mentally exhausted, because you feel like you're the only one that sees it.

The few in Sardis saw it, they saw both sides, and they overcame, by the blood of the Lamb, and by the words of the testimony, and loving their lives not unto death. For thou, Psalms 1839, it's not on the screen, for thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle. You see, these few in Sardis, church, listen, for those of you that see these things, God promises he's going to gird you with strength, you hold on to God, you keep praying, you keep fasting, you keep wrestling with God.

People might think you're a maniac, but that's fine, Jesus loves your heart, he knows who you are, amen? He knows who you are to the point that he actually named the few in Sardis, he wanted to encourage them, he says, I see you guys, I see you guys, and he encouraged them, as I'm trying to encourage some of you right now. You're praying, you're weeping, you think, why am I weeping so much? When I look at TV, and I see the antics, and I see the sin, and the debauchery, and I see it all, and you just start crying, you get teary-eyed, you're just broken inside, you don't understand what's going on, you just feel like you've lost it inside. That's the Spirit of Christ in you! Because he says, Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears, because he was broken over the world! He's broken over it! And that's the same Christ in you! You're going to be broken over it! You're going to weep! And Joel, if you read the entire book of Joel, it talks about lamenting, and howling, and weeping, and crying for the abominations of the world! Put a trumpet to your lips and blow it! That's you! Don't quit! You don't quit! You kept pressing on! You may have a spouse that's dead, and you know you're alive! You press on, amen? You press on! God's got your back! So they tested the spirits, and how increasingly tempting it was when they seen the dead church fading away.

It was just like I was imagining them on the beach shore, and the dead church, the majority of them was in a boat, and they drifted slowly off into the distance, and the few watched them. And they looked over at each other and said, well, there's just a few of us left. How increasingly tempting it is for you and I, when the church goes one direction, and the temptation is to follow that direction.

Well, hardly anybody comes to church, and it's tempting not to come to church in the midweek services, because hardly anybody's coming. And you measure that. Don't use that as a measuring stick.

Don't do it. You obey God. And don't get your eyes fixed on other people's sins, and on the dead church, to where it totally makes you looking at them constantly.

Jesus was approached by Peter, and Peter says, hey, look at them. They're not doing this, and they're not doing this. And Jesus looks at Peter, and he says, what is that to you? Follow thou me.

Let others go astray if they want. That's their choice. God gave them a choice.

Now you follow God. Amen? So God has, and still always has, a remnant. In Romans 11.4, here the whole world goes to Baal.

In Romans 11.4, he says, I have reserved myself 7,000 men who have not bowed to Baal. God has a remnant today. The debtor the church gets.

I know, Kathy, that's not a correct word. But I made it so I'm clear, and I'll put it in the dictionary later for myself. The debtor the church gets.

Listen, I'm really just about done. The debtor the church gets. And the more you and I draw to Christ, get closer to him, listen, naturally our light becomes brighter.

Naturally becomes brighter. And will become an offense to the dead church. Because you're not walking where they used to walk.

Because they're blinded. So naturally, it will be an offense to those who are on life support. Who are satisfied where they are at with God in their own deadness.

Many are not taking Jesus very seriously today. As you, or I. And again, sometimes you feel maybe you've just, you've lost it. So in the end, he says, these that overcome, I'm not going to blot out their names out of the book of life.

It's interesting that Jesus uses the word overcome. I could preach another message on that, but that's, my time is done. And people say all the time, the one saved, always saved doctrine I've always used.

You can't erase blood, no, but you can blot it out. Jesus even said that. You can blot it out.

Let's all stand. Can't call sister Anita, she don't have the piano. She gone, she gone.

Church, if God has spoken to you, it's all I can ask you to pray. I can't beg you. It's time to pray.

We've gotten so used to not praying. My question for all of us is, Jesus, you know what it boils down to? Is Jesus worth it? Is the cross worth it to you or I? Is he worth it? That's the question that you have to face and I have to face. It's not about, oh, I've got to pray.

Don't make prayer an idol. It's not about that. It's not gauging yourself, oh, I'm not crying today, I must be lost.

No, don't do that. You're pulling yourself into God. You're wanting to become more like Christ and the more you become like Christ, the more you're pressing in, the more you spend time with him, the more you're going to feel and know his heart.

You're naturally just going to weep and groan over the state of things. You've lost your prayer life. If you stop watching for his return, you're no longer loving and hasting his appearing as the scripture says.

You can just come up here and pray now. You can pray in your seats. And God, restore unto me a right spirit.

Restore unto me a prayer life that I once had. I used to weep. I used to fast.

I used to be so vibrant. And it's fading. Father, here we are.

The warning signs have been delivered. I've done what I believe I should have done, and that's to deliver my soul. And I've done it.

And those here today who are blinded, who may even be pushing back on the Holy Spirit now, say, no, that's not me. I ask you, God, to be merciful. Help them, Father.

Drop the scales off their eyes and help them to see things like they've never seen before. Go into a realm of God. Church, I want everybody right now just to lift your hands.

Lift your hands to God and start to pray and cry out to God right now. This is not a time to play church. This is not a time to want to talk to people after church.

This is time to get a hold of God. And so, Father, here we are today. We need you more than ever today.

God, I ask you, Lord, to birth something in each of us, Father God, a fire that's unquenchable, Father God. Father, do a work of grace in each of us today, God. Do something that you've never done before, God.

Change us. Transform us. Renew us.

God, let us not even walk through those doors outside to our cars until we are worked over by the Holy Spirit of God. I'm asking you, Father, today, those who are walking with you closely, those who feel discouraged in their spirit, God, strengthen them, Father God, in these last days. Guard them as you promised you would, Father God.

I'm asking you, Father God, to help them, Father God, to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, not the circumstances, not the sins of the church, but to keep their eyes on Christ and Christ alone. And we thank you, God, for what you're going to do through us and for your namesake, Father God. Revive us again.

Send the revival, Father God, to our hearts, to our homes, Father God. May a revival start in our cars on the way home. Hallelujah.

I pray there will be a great revival in our workplaces, Father God. I pray that we'll be burning and bright, Father God. I pray we get so close to Jesus, we would have to put the veil over our face, showing the glory of God.

And that someone would say, there's something different about you I've never seen before. Dear God, I pray you'd get us to a place of prayer and a place of holiness unto the Lord that we could show the city, the nation, Christ, the resurrection power of Christ today, God. Do it, Father God.

Do it for your namesake. Do it for your church. Do it for your bride.

And we ask you, God, to move upon our hearts, Father God, so we couldn't move anymore. Break through the callousness of our hearts, God. And I pray, Father, those who are resisting the Holy Spirit, God, break through that hardness of their heart.

Break through in Jesus' name, until they prostrate themselves upon the floor and cry and groan and weep for what they should have been, and they are not. I pray, God, this is not that. I pray they'll come to the place and they'll say, I want that, what I should be in the Lord.

Hallelujah. And I'm asking you, Father God, to do it. For your namesake, Lord, bring forth a revival that we could see this whole city turned upside down for the glory of God.

I ask you, Father God, you would raise up every church in this city that's dead in Christ, that, Father God, that pastors of those cities, Father God, would become alive in Christ, Father God. They may be known as alive, but they are dead in the middle. I ask you, God, help us, Father God, not to be known as dead to you, but, Father, we would truly be alive to Christ.

Our reputation would truly be alive to Christ. And I thank you for what you're going to do through us that we can genuinely see conversions of the lost, Father God. Not musical chairs any longer, but we would see people coming into faith in Christ, truly repenting of their sins, being born again of the spirit of God.

That we see Christ exalted above everything else in our lives, Father. And I pray, Father, that you would use us to the very max, very max, Lord. Use us, Lord.

We love you. We thank you for warning us. We thank you for your grace and we thank you for your mercy.

We thank you for swooning us. We thank you, Father God, for prodding us as the Sardis Church was prodded over and over and over, God. Help us not to resist the proddings of the Holy Ghost.

And I ask you, God, again, to move upon us in Jesus' name, in Jesus' name.

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