

(A Living Challenge) a Living Challenge for a Dying Church

by Dale Gish

The church must avoid the danger of prosperity and focus on being a sanctified people, united in their love for God and each other.

Duration: 1:33:11

Scripture: Revelation 3:2

Topics: "Spiritual Vigilance", "Church Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being watchful and perceptive in all directions. He warns that the enemy will start a fire in the south, which will consume everything in the east, west, and north. The preacher urges the congregation to learn from history and not be careless. He highlights the need to strengthen the things that remain and to repent for any shortcomings in their works before God.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

This message is not copyrighted and is not to be bought or sold. You are welcome to make copies for your friends and neighbors. If you would like additional messages, please go to our website for a complete listing at www.charityministries.org. If you would like a catalog of other sermons, please call 1-800-227-7902 or write to Charity Ministries, 400 West Main Street, Suite 1, EFRA PA 17522.

These messages are offered to all without charge by the free will offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. I'll just say that I love the children's lesson.

That's a very special Bible story for all of us. For all of us who have ever been through a fiery trial. It took me back to a fiery trial.

And I remember reading that story. And I remember how it seems like God spoke to me and said that those three men of faith came through the fiery trial without the smell of smoke upon their clothes. And it just seemed like God was telling me that by His grace, we could come through a fiery trial without the smell of bitterness of any kind.

Complete forgiveness, completely free. Only the ropes were consumed. If you're in a fiery trial, read that story.

I was in one, one time. And I came home late one night. And my mother had a little songbook.

She'd gone to bed. But she had left the songbook open. She had this little chair that she sat in, in the living room.

And I walked right by it when I came in the front door to go to my room. And I saw that little songbook open there. My mother wanted me to read the words of that song.

When through fiery trials, thy pathway shall lie. My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply. The flames will not hurt thee.

I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. We greet you this morning in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just had a desire as I was sitting there and being drawn to God through the first part of the service to get real close to God.

So close to God that I could hear His heartbeat. I've been intrigued some thinking about a heartbeat. There is something in a heartbeat that guarantees there is life.

There is something in a heartbeat that guarantees that the blood is flowing. That's what a heartbeat does. I just had a desire to be real close to the heartbeat of God.

We all know what it means to hear someone's heartbeat. To hear their heart. It just means you are so in tune with that person that you feel what they feel.

You sense what they sense. You are in tune with them. And that's the desire that we have this morning.

That we would be that in tune with God that we could hear His heartbeat. There was a man one time, he had a watch. Very expensive.

Very precious. And it so happened that one day he lost his watch. And he thought that he lost it in the hay.

And he shared it with his friends. And they came together to help him search for his watch. And they were looking for his watch in the hay.

And they were talking while they were searching. Where did you think you had it last? What does your watch look like? And they were searching for his watch. And they were talking and searching for his watch.

And I want to tell you this morning they never found his watch. A little bit later there was a young lad. He came to the man.

He held it up. He said, is this your watch? The man's eyes lit up with joy. That's it.

That's my watch. You found my watch. How did you find my watch? The young lad said that he liked to go lay down in the hay.

And he had gone to just rest quietly in the hay. And he said, I heard it. And I just moved toward the ticket.

And there it was. Can we quiet our hearts that way today? Before the God of heaven. That we could hear his very heartbeat.

And move toward his heartbeat. And there he is. I trust we can sense his presence in a very real way here today.

We greet you this morning in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I believe that I can say this morning that we have a burden upon our heart. It's a burden for the church.

The body of Christ. The people of God. God's own people.

Part of himself. His very own body. And I trust that our burden today is a sanctified burden.

I trust that it's consistent with the heart of God. You know, we don't want to have a selfish denominational burden. We don't want to have a traditional type burden.

We just want to share God's burden. And I believe that God has a burden for his people. You know, brothers and sisters, when we get real close to God, not just this way, but this way.

When you get real close to God, you not only gain salvation, you not only gain the joy of the Lord, but when you stay right there, you begin to sense his burden. And God has a burden for his people. As I look into the Word of God, as I look into the very heart of God, I see that burden.

You read the letters to the seven churches of Asia, and you will know that God has a burden for his people. In each letter there is somewhat of a cry, somewhat of a plea, to his people from the very heart of God. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And I want to challenge us this morning. How does the Spirit speak? How are you going to hear what the Spirit says to the churches? I tell you, the Spirit doesn't stand in heaven and blow a trumpet before Him, and all the earth will hear what the Spirit says to the churches. How does He speak? A still, small voice.

We're going to have to quiet our hearts. There are men who have studied the seven churches from a traditional study. They have studied it from a historic study.

They have studied it from a theological study, and they have never heard what the Spirit says to the churches. That's not head knowledge. That's quieting your heart before God and getting very close to His heart to hear what He says to the churches.

In each letter, there is a very clear message that God desires for His church to be an overcoming church. He's not interested in a traditional church. He's not interested in a drifting church.

He's not interested in a church that coasts because of the faith of their fathers. He's not interested in a proud church. He is interested in an overcoming church.

And if we are going to be an overcoming church, that simply means that we are in a battle. That is what overcoming means. It means that there is a battle.

And when there is a battle, there is no victory for us in a collective way until we unite our hearts together into one against the enemy. Being united, being one, is a very big thing to God. There is a Scripture that tells us of a good place to be.

I want to quote it to you. I want to see if you recognize where this place is. There is a place in the Word of God where it says, For there, right there, the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.

Do you know where that is? Do you know where that place is? Right there. For there, the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore. Do you know where it is? Where is it? Thank you, brother.

Psalms 133. Behold how good and how pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity. And then he goes on to give some poetic descriptions of what that is like.

And then he says, For there, the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore. Being one is a big thing with God. I challenge you for just a moment to think about the Trinity.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one. And they agree in one.

And there is no competition between them. And they have different roles to play and different roles to fill, but they are united. Does the Holy Spirit wish that He was the Father? No.

He brings no attention to Himself. Does the Son think that He should be in His Father's place? No. He came only to do His Father's will.

Whatever the Father says, that's what I do. I came not to do my own will, but to do the will of Him that sent me. They are one.

And Jesus makes it clear in John 17 that as I and my Father are one, that's the way He wants us to be one. That ye would be one, even as I and my Father. Are we that united? What I'd like to do today in sharing this burden that I feel for the people of God is first, I would like to consider one big lesson that we can learn from history.

It's a lesson about the people of God. And I would like to just let ourselves be impressed with that lesson. I would like to let God write that lesson upon the tables of our heart so that it is there in a very real way.

I'd like to let it sink down into our mind. And I trust that we're not going to let it only be history. May God reveal to us that that lesson applies to us right here in this present day.

Those who have our being in this present day and more specifically in this fellowship. There is a lesson that God would teach us from history. Then I would like to turn to Revelation 3 to the church at Sardis.

And I want to take a look at the church at Sardis. And that will bring us to the title that we have for our message today. I would like for the title to be A Living Challenge for a Dying Church.

That title comes from the church at Sardis in Revelation 3. And it's good for us to learn this lesson from history. Take a look at the church at Sardis and let God speak to our hearts today. A Living Challenge for a Dying Church.

Our desire today is that we want to lift up the Word of God. We want to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ. I tell you, that's our desire.

That we would fix our gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The Crucified. Risen.

Lord of all. That we could fix our gaze upon Him. And we can do that today, brothers and sisters.

And God has laid it on my heart to sound a warning to us, the people of God. That we can sound that warning by not taking our eyes off of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the warning comes from Him.

He's the One who gave it to us. And so can we open our hearts today to receive a warning from the very heart of God. Being close to His heart.

Hearing His heartbeat. Sharing His burden. Sensing what He senses.

Feeling what He feels. I believe that the Spirit of God is here today if we are willing to hear from Him. I've been thinking a lot lately about the people of God.

You know, God's own people. The ones that He purchased with His own blood. His purchased possession.

We are not our own. We are bought with a price. A tremendous price.

A stupendous price. We belong to Him. Those people, that men and women, whomsoever will upon the earth, who carry the witness of Jesus Christ in their life.

I mean, they march to the tune of a different leader. They are not drawn to the things of this world. The entertainments and the things of this life that the crowds flock to.

We're not drawn that way. We have no drawing there. You know, the people of God.

The people of faith. The people who have had the veil taken away from their eyes and they've seen God. Those people have a burden for those people.

The ones, the forgiven ones, who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect. Those people. The ones who forgive among themselves.

490 times in a row. Amen? That's pretty scriptural. I've been thinking about the people of God.

The ones who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Who walk in the Spirit. Who are filled with all the fullness of God.

Those people. As you look back over the years at those people, and you consider history along with the Word of God, there is a lesson that you can learn about God's people. And it's a very sobering lesson.

And that lesson is that the people of God do real well. In unity. In faith.

In holiness. In sanctification. They do real well in times of persecution.

But they don't do well in times of prosperity. That's just one of those lessons, brothers and sisters. I mean, it's just there.

And it is a very glaring lesson. It is so glaring. It is so clear.

It is so irrefutable. Through the Scriptures, through all of history, that you've about got to be blind to not see it. That's just the way it is.

The people of God do real well in persecution. And they don't do well in times of prosperity. I knew a man who escaped the persecution of Romania.

He lived there. He was part of the persecuted church. God was very real to him.

And he wanted freedom. He wanted liberty to serve God without the suppression. And God opened the door for him to escape.

Through the iron curtain. Past the guards at the Danube River. And he dove into the water and he swam.

And the guards were shooting at him. And they heard the bullets hitting the water beside him. And he got out into the current of the Danube River.

And it got the best of him. And it took him down. And he knew that he was ready to die.

And then he said he felt something pulling him back to the surface. He said he got to the surface. And he made it to the other side.

And he made it to America. I met him in America. And he lost his vision of God in the prosperity of America.

I don't know where he is today. I trust the mercy of God has done to him the same in America that it did in the Danube River. And just began to draw him back to himself.

But he didn't do well in prosperity. Even in the Old Testament you can read the Kings and the Chronicles. Israel as the people of God in times of prosperity.

They just gained confidence in their own strength. They gained confidence in their horses. They gained confidence in their own army.

And then God would send the enemy to suppress them. And when they got under the suppression of the enemy, they'd just cry out to God and say, God, we have sinned. Have mercy upon us.

Draw us back to yourself. It happened over and over and over again. All through the Scriptures and all through history.

I tell you this morning, if it's a lesson you cannot see, you've got to be blind to not see it. May God write that lesson upon our hearts. But isn't it amazing how that happened? Time after time.

Do you know you can look at the church in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit, how it came down. What an anointed church was there at Jerusalem.

I love to read about that. Oh, I think it'd be such a blessing to live in those days. But brothers and sisters, the promises of God were not for Pentecost only.

I believe that it's here today. And that we can experience all that they experienced. I believe it says in Acts chapter 1 through 7, you can read about the prospering of that church.

But you read in chapter 8 verse 1, I'll just read this to you. It says at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. And there it is.

The persecution at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. And it talks about Saul making havoc with the church.

And then it says in verse 4, Therefore, because of this persecution, they were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word. I tell you, the Word of God prospered under that great anointed church at Jerusalem. I mean, here they were.

They were gathered together. They were hearing from God. They had prophets.

They were prophesying. They were edifying one another in a powerful way. And down came persecution upon that church.

And when the persecution came down, they went everywhere preaching the Word of God. And souls were saved. And I tell you, they started churches everywhere.

All throughout the known world. They started churches everywhere. And those churches prospered under their teaching.

The Bible says they turned the world upside down. That was a product of persecution when there was an anointed church. That's what the Bible says.

They that have turned the world upside down have come hither also. And I believe that there is some encouragement in that for us. But there is a warning as well.

Especially if you look at the churches that they started in Asia. Those churches prospered. But there was a point in time where they began to prosper naturally.

They began to do pretty well. And they began to gain confidence in themselves. And you know, it wasn't very long until God, through the Holy Spirit, began sending those churches some pretty sobering letters saying that if they didn't repent and get back to their first love, God was going to pull the candlestick out of their place.

That's a pretty sobering letter from the Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters. To pull a candlestick out of its place. And it's a sobering thought to me because I don't believe a church is supposed to be in one place for a few years and then it's gone again.

And we had some young brothers in our fellowship who just took a trip to the country of Turkey and they went to these locations where these seven churches were located and they're all gone. They read an account where at one point, a few years ago, they weren't sure if there were eleven Christians in Turkey. And that is where the prosperous church of Ephesus was based.

All the churches of Asia were in Turkey. Present day Turkey. And it's all gone.

So, starting in Acts and all through the ages, churches who had their focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whether it comes in the next generation, whether it comes by the voices of the world calling them, getting their attention, whether it comes through deceit, however it gets there, the heart, the focus of churches gets turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ in a very subtle way. And then you begin to see divisions and disputings and individuality and unforgiveness. And then bitterness sets in.

And carnality and worldliness. And I want to tell you that oftentimes all of that is right in the midst of extremely spiritual talk. Praise God! He gave me a new wife.

My Lumen wasn't born again. All kinds of spiritual talk in the midst of extreme carnality, selfishness, individuality. And God desires to have purity in His church.

So, I challenge you this morning, do you see that lesson in history? Is it real to you? If anyone should be sobered by this lesson, if anyone should take this lesson to heart, it should be us who live here in America. But I want to stand here today as a representative of God. I want to stand here in the place of God.

And I can tell you this morning that causes my heart to tremble. But I want to speak the words of God. I'm going to tell you this morning that it does not have to be that way.

We believe in the keeping power of God. We believe that He is able to keep us from falling. That's as scriptural as you can get.

Unto Him who is able to keep us from falling. I tell you it doesn't have to be that way. If it does, if there's no way around it, if repeating that history is the only option, then we need to move to China now.

It's our only hope. But the Word of God tells us who are kept by the power of God, who yield themselves to that keeping power. God is able to keep His people holy and sanctified and pure.

Hot for God. Hating this world. Very discerning.

Very sharp. Knowing what things lead to. Knowing where to say no.

Knowing where to say yes. Knowing where to let the fire burn. Knowing where to put the fire out.

God is able to keep us from falling. God is able to turn our hearts away, brothers and sisters, from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Fads and fashions and entertainment and all that garbage out there is no attraction to the people of God.

We don't have to repeat history. But I'm going to tell you this morning, that's exactly what is going to happen unless we gird up the loins of our mind and get sober. And put on the whole armor of God this morning.

And stop reacting to each other. And insisting on Christian liberty. And everything is not legalism.

And being under authority is not ridiculous. We've got to stop reacting to these things. And come into our place before a holy God.

And honor His order. I believe we need to expose the enemy. I believe we need to do it very specifically.

Doing it in a general way will never work. It doesn't matter how hard you bring down your hand against sin. Everybody is going to say amen.

But when you start naming them, you know the old saying, empty the church house. Why? Because when you get specific, conviction sets in. You ever notice the rich young ruler? You know, he was a very diligent man.

The Bible says he ran to the Lord Jesus Christ and fell at His feet and worshiped Him. That's pretty good. And the Word of God says that Jesus loved him.

And as long as Jesus was general, Amen! I've done it all from my youth. But as soon as Jesus got specific, He walked away sorrowful. Does God have liberty to get specific here today? Brothers and sisters, I don't know how else the Holy Spirit is going to guide us into the ways of all truth unless we give Him that liberty.

We need to put on the whole armor of God this morning. And I want to tell you this morning that we not only need to put on the whole armor of God, we need to use it to take a stand. I believe that's what the Word of God says, in having done all to take a stand.

And what does it mean, having done all to take a stand? I tell you, to me it just sounds like we are doing something to stand. Specifically. It's the only way to take a stand.

We're not here, brothers and sisters, to talk about the armor of God. We're not here to polish the armor of God and make it beautiful. We are here to use it.

Your armor of God may be blood-stained armor. It's good armor. But we're here to use it.

And if we don't rise up in the spirit of revelation here in America and use it, we're going to repeat history all over again, right here. I tell you this morning, the enemy has made more inroads into the lives of God's people by being transformed into an angel of light in times of prosperity than he ever did as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. When you see the devil coming at you like a roaring lion and he's showing his fangs and he hates you and he sends that hatred, you're going to run to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You're going to refuse everything He has to offer and you're going to do it with Scripture. But when He comes to you as an angel of light and He's saying, praise the Lord, brother, we'll listen. We're not afraid of Him anymore.

There was a time when the devil would bring persecution on anyone who even dared to have a Bible. But his tactics have changed here in America. He's given a dozen Bibles to everyone.

He took them to the printing press. He sent them through and he sent them everywhere. Today he's an angel of light with Bibles everywhere.

Old Satan, he smiled when he looked down at men. His new tricks were working again and again. No more persecution.

No shortage of bread. God's church and His people well loved and well fed. The saints who once gathered in secret, unknown, now worship in freedom on land of their own in comfortable buildings designed and well planned, shade trees in the churchyard, no tax on the land.

The Bible, the book of the ages suppressed, the book that our forefathers prayed to possess, now sold in abundance, on sale, guaranteed. We all have our own and we know how to read. Deception, the slow subtleness that sets in, that fogs out the line, that defines what is sin.

And even the devil, though black as the night, has now been transformed to an angel of light. And old Satan smiled as he gazed at the view. His new tricks were working.

Too good to be true. No more persecution. No shortage of bread.

God's church and His people well loved and well fed. When Satan comes to you as an angel of light, his face shines. He speaks gently.

He's quoting Scripture. He does that. And we're comfortable in His presence.

And I have seen people, I'm going to say it this way, I have seen people literally run into His arms and say, Amen, brother. And they don't run into His arms and say, Amen, brother, by saying, Amen to I hate God, or by saying, Amen to hell is fine with me. That's not the way He comes.

They do it by saying, Amen, that is not right what my brother did to me. How my pastor is, and how he approached me, and how he handled that situation is not right. Amen, brother.

And we embrace it. That is an angel of light. Or we say Amen to this angel of light by saying Amen to divorce.

Things like, it wasn't right for me to be with that companion. They're not born again. They wouldn't hear from God.

And I need the encouragement of someone who is right from God. Amen. Or they say, as long as I have a testimony, I think it's okay if I enjoy a few pleasures of this world.

It's okay if we enjoy ourselves. God didn't create us for misery. He created us for His pleasure.

And so it's okay to enjoy ourselves in a few of these world pleasures. Amen. And they embrace Him.

Or we say, I know that I have some private sins, and I know it's not right, but I believe that God understands. I want to tell you something tonight. God doesn't understand.

But the devil transformed to an angel of light. He understands. And we embrace Him.

Amen, brother. I tell you, all of that is just running into the devil's camp and saying Amen. And it's not just saying Amen to the devil.

Did you know that? I mean, all of his angels, all of his cohorts have been transformed into angels of light. They have been transformed into deceitful workers, into the apostles of Christ. That is what the Word of God says.

His whole camp is transformed into the church of God. And His workers are all transformed. Into the apostles of Christ.

You know, I'd like to read that. Let's turn. It would be good for us to read that.

2 Corinthians 11. Let's turn there. In this chapter, I believe Paul was very close to the heart of God.

I believe that he was sensing God's burden for His people. And Paul says in verse 2, Paul says, I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I want us to look down in verse 13.

It says, For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their

works.

I mean, there you have it, brothers and sisters, from the very Word of God. The devil and his camp, his workers, have been transformed into ministers of righteousness. And the apostles of Christ, and they are not of God.

They're false apostles. That's what they are. They are not ministers of righteousness.

Now, sometimes they look like they are. That's where the deceitfulness lies. They look like they are.

They sound like they are in their talk. But they're not. They're false apostles and deceitful workers.

And I want you to know something this morning. They are everywhere. And they're giving seminars.

And they're making tapes. And they're making CDs. And they're holding seminars to teach us how to walk with God.

And our children are listening to some of their CDs. And it's the highest form of deception that there is because they have good words to say and a form of godliness. But underneath it all, brothers and sisters, there's an underlying current connected to this dying world and it is sweeping the church of God.

Into mainstream Christianity. I hope that you're getting the burden of this message. I tell you, this morning, I don't want to be negative.

God is good. God is a gracious God. And I believe I'm speaking to perceptive people.

But brothers and sisters, we don't dare be asleep. These deceitful workers are everywhere. False apostles and deceitful workers as the apostles of Christ.

Transformed into ministers of righteousness. As I read that Scripture, I was thinking about it the other day. And you know what that Scripture is as a politician would describe them? That Scripture is a Scripture on terrorism.

That's what a terrorist is. A terrorist is someone out of the enemy's camp who looks just like you. They don't dress like the enemy.

They don't look like the enemy. They dress just like you do. That's what a terrorist is.

But he hates you. And he's out to deceive you. And he's out to kill you.

And that's what we have read in that Scripture in Corinthians. I remember, I was thinking about when the great towers came down in New York City on 9-11 about five years ago. And you know when that happened, the United States was ready to fight.

And they had all the power to do it. They had so much power that no one could stand against them. But they didn't know who to fight.

Because they didn't know who the enemy was. And they didn't know where the enemy was. And he had been in our midst all along.

The enemy had gone to our flight training schools. We had taught him to fly our airplanes. He was right in our midst all along.

Perfect hatred for all of us. Presenting himself as one of us. We had supported him financially to go to our school to fly our planes to destroy us.

That is what a terrorist is. And the devil, though black as the night, has now been transformed to an angel of light. And his ministers have been transformed into ministers of righteousness.

And they're everywhere. So, what do we do? Study the enemy? No. Come up with a bunch of rules and regulations? You know what rules and regulations are? I'm not talking about scriptural guidelines.

They're just something to prove how far you are from God. You're not like this. You're over here, so you need them.

I've got a better solution than having them. You know, you come up to someone who's right in the presence of God. Someone who's worshipping God.

Someone who's connected to God. Someone who's rejoicing in their salvation. Someone who hears the heartbeat of God.

And you say, Hey, I want you to do this and this and this. And I don't want you to do this and this and this. And he's going to look at you like, What are you talking about? Those things are a distraction to him.

Because he's right here. That's our heart this morning, brothers and sisters. That is what we need to do.

We don't need to focus on the enemy. We don't need to study the enemy. We don't need to fear the enemy.

We need to get real close to God. I believe that. That's the solution that we need to have.

We need to fix our gaze upon God. That's the lesson that we can learn from history. Now I would like to turn to the book of Revelation.

I would just like to read through a few verses here. At the start of Revelation. In chapter 1. This Revelation.

I was just thinking of this as we shared our message last Friday night. That God wants to give us something. He wants to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

And the whole book of Revelation is a revelation. And let's see what God had in mind when He gave it. It says right here, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him.

And I read that and I thought, well, amen, Lord, that's what I want! The revelation from God of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him to show unto His servants. That revelation is for us. I mean, John got it on the Isle of Patmos, but anybody that thinks revelation originated on the Isle of Patmos, you've got another thing coming.

This is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him. And yes, it was on the Isle of Patmos, but it was for us. I would encourage us to read this.

Let's read it. This passage of Scripture to me is exciting reading. I'd just like to read it.

And as I've heard brothers say before, just fasten your seatbelts and let's go. Who bear record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that He saw? Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace unto you and peace from Him which is and which was and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead and the Prince of the kings of the earth.

Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Behold, He cometh with clouds and every eye shall see Him and the ulcer which pierced Him and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen.

I just read that and I was just thinking, you know, there's a day coming when that's going to be reality. What is reality today? Reality today is a still, small voice. We don't hear Him often because if it was a great voice like John heard behind him, and John turned around and he saw the glory of God, today there's a still, small voice.

There's a gentle prompting on the door of your heart. And I was just thinking, if we answer that prompting today, what a joyful time this will be. It says here that all the earth shall wail because of Him.

It's because they didn't answer that gentle prompting. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, which is and which was and which is to come the Almighty. I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus.

I ask myself when I read that, is that worth waiting for? I mean, patience of Jesus Christ is a phrase there in that verse. He was on the isle that was called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I want to tell you this morning, I was on the isle of Patmos one time.

I stood there. I climbed up that little island. The ship was docked.

The children were playing down at the seashore. And we walked up that lonely little hill. It's just a small island.

At the top of the island, there's a little rock cave. And they told us, this is where John received his revelation from God. And I stood there.

And I don't think that makes the revelation more holy in that place. But I'll tell you, brothers and sisters, when you are in a place where heaven opened, it does something to you. I stood one time on Calvary.

I saw the place of a skull. It's right there in the mountain. It just looked like a skull.

It's just right there. There's just little indents in the rock. And it just looked like a skull.

And I stood there. And I looked on the hill just above it. Calvary.

Then we walked over to the little garden tomb. It has a low opening. You have to stoop down to get in.

But I went in. That does something to you. You don't have to be there for it to do something to you.

If you will hear the gentle prompting. I'll never forget as I stood there at Golgotha looking at the skull on the side of a little rock hill. And there's a little rail there.

And I was looking and I was beholding the place where my Lord was crucified. And I turned around and I looked across the rail. And there was a bus depot.

And it was full of people. And it was full of people of that land speaking in a different language. They were busy.

They had no thought of God. I could tell looking. God was not in their thoughts.

And it just creates a burden within your heart. And you just want to cry out and you just say, Oh, that men would rejoice in God, their Savior. God is not going to reveal the depths and the ugliness of man's heart without revealing a remedy.

It does something to you to be within a stone's throw of where Jesus died. And being within a stone's throw of a crowd of people who pay no attention to His death. The commandment to John in verse 19 says, John, write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

John's job was to write down this revelation. Our job is to read it and to believe. So, with the background of the dangers around us, let's take a look at what John wrote to his dearest friend.

I would like to read in chapter 3 to the church at Sardis and consider a living challenge for a dying church. Verse 1 says that unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write these things, saith he that hath the seven spirits of God. I know thy works, that thou hast the name that thou livest, and art dead.

That's the first thing God said to a dead and a dying church was, I know thy works. But you know, when God looks at our works, it's interesting to me, He looks right past who we say we are. He looks right past the reputation that we have and He lays His finger right on who we are really.

I know thy works, that thou hast the name that thou livest, and art dead. And I think the bigger part of Sardis' problem was not that they were dead, it's that they were dead and have a name that they live. And they love that name.

They love that reputation. And I tell you, brothers and sisters, that is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy? Big time! When you have a name that you live, and you are dead, we need to repent.

We need to take a look at our life. When God says, I know thy works, it gets real practical, real quick. There's no theology in it.

There's no cover-ups available when God says, I know thy works. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. I know thy works, God says, and He draws a conclusion from their works that they were dead.

But I want us to just... This came to my mind as I read this. God is a merciful God. God didn't say to Sardis, okay, Sardis is a dead church out with a candlestick.

That's it. A bruised reed will He not break. Smoking flax will He not quench.

He left the candlestick there. He left that flickering flame, that dying, smoking wick there. And He gave them a living challenge.

A living challenge for a dying church. That's my testimony of how God dealt with me. That's how I got in.

But I know thy works. You know, I was just thinking as I read this. I was thinking about Malachi 2. It says in Malachi 2 that the people covered the altar of the Lord with tears and with weeping and crying out.

That sounds pretty repentant, doesn't it? They covered the altar with tears and weeping and crying out. And God said, I will not hear your prayers. Do you know why He told them He wouldn't hear them? He said, because I see the way you treat your wife.

I know thy works. I hear what you're saying, but He doesn't pay any attention to that. That's outward appearance.

He goes to the heart. I see the way you treat your wife. I know thy works.

And when your life doesn't measure up to your testimony, God is not well pleased. As we think about a living challenge for a dying church which God gave them, I would just like to read verses 2 and 3. The living challenge for this church. The challenge that I believe we need to take today is here with these verses.

Verse 2, Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. For I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.

There's five things that we've read in that verse. Be watchful. Strengthen the things which remain.

Remember. Hold fast. And repent.

Does that sound too simple? This morning? Does it sound too basic and too general? I want us to know this morning it's not a living challenge because it's complicated. It's a living challenge because if you do it in faith, it will bring life. That's a living challenge.

There's nothing new here. But there is something very, very scriptural. And brothers and sisters, it doesn't matter how simple it is, when there is something very scriptural, there's an anointed power behind it.

All the power of heaven is behind it. When there's a scriptural warning, there's an anointed reason behind it. And when there's a scriptural formula to solve a problem, there's anointed power behind it to back it up.

There are anointed results that will follow no matter how small or simple it may seem. May we never forget that. Be watchful.

That's step number one of a living challenge. What does that mean? The Greek word there means to be awake. To be alert.

It does not mean, hey, it's alright. I'm edified when I do this. Lightweight statements that cast off the discernment of God.

That's not being watchful. It doesn't mean to justify yourself in all that you do. I'll tell you what it does mean.

It means stop and take a look at your life. It means examine yourselves and see whether you'll be in the faith. It means compare your life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It means search the Scriptures daily and see if you've been through metamorphosis. Amen? It means gird up the loins of your mind and be sober. Watchfulness is an attitude of the mind.

Other parallel verses in the Scripture would be 1 Peter 5, chapter 5, verse 8, when it says to be sober, be vigilant. Vigilant is a watchword. Live your life like you're in the watchtower.

That's part of the living challenge for a dying church. It means being alert to danger. And if you read in Ephesians 5.15, it says, say that you walk circumspectly.

And do you know what circumspectly means? I like the word circumference. It's in that word. Circumference means all the way around the circle.

Circumference is from here all the way around. And be careful that way. When you're in the watchtower, be looking all the way around.

You know, can you imagine a fire tower in the forest watching for forest fires and there's a man in the tower. And he always looks to the north. He keeps a sharp eye on the north.

And he looks to the east and the west. And he makes sure there's no fires there. But he never looks to the south.

What kind of a watchman is he? The enemy will start a fire in the south every time. And it will consume everything to the east and the west and the north because it's too late to stop it. Walk circumspectly.

Be perceptive in all directions, brothers and sisters. Look in all directions. Look ahead down the road and see where this thing might lead.

Look back the road behind you and learn where it led. That's part of the burden of the message this morning. Can we learn from history? God says if a dying church will do that, it will bring them life.

Are you watchful? Or are you careless? I'd like to take a little test this morning. I was just thinking about this. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.

Someone who is not watchful will often say things like, who says I can't do this? Or, if he can do this, then I can do it. Or if he can do this, then I can do that. They begin to question authority.

Or I know there's a little danger in this thing, but I believe I can handle it. We don't know our own heart. Those are not statements that come from a watchful heart.

And we hear it all the time, brothers and sisters. What's wrong with my music? Why can't I listen to this kind of music? And I hear it all the time. I mean, maybe we hear from God on these things, but sometimes I wonder, even when we hear things like, why can't I go swimming? What's wrong with swimming? Well, I don't know what's wrong with swimming.

I don't know if anything's wrong with swimming. But I know this, that when you begin to have your friends over and you swim for a little while, and you lay out there and you begin to tan your body just a little bit, so you get more attractive, the question is no longer, what's wrong with swimming? The question is, what is

wrong with you as a child of grace that you would have that kind of fellowship with this world? Can we rise up in the spirit of revelation and get some discernment from the Holy Ghost to lead us in the ways of all truth? Someone who is watchful will not say those kind of things. Their questions go deeper.

Not what's wrong with my music, but will it bring revival? Will it encourage metamorphosis? Oftentimes, people who are not watchful will make fun of other people's convictions. And I know all those statements, they can be said right. There's a time when you can ask those questions with the right spirit, but come on.

Basically, people that say those things and ask those questions are not watchful and they're going to repeat history all over again. They are going to watch them. You can learn the lesson again.

This lesson that we've had before us today, it's happening today. It's not hard to look and see it happen. It's happening all around us.

The second thing that God gives in verse 2 is to strengthen the things that remain. I'm not sure what to say about this, but it's referring to their works. You read that here.

Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. This is referring to something in everyday life. And I think I'll just say this and leave it with you, brothers and sisters.

I encourage you to talk about these things. You know, there's often times when there's a scriptural teaching. I'll just use one like the covering.

That's a scriptural command. There's reasons for it. We may not understand them all.

But, you know, it's not salvation. And we know that. And so we're a little bit scared to bring that thing up because we want salvation.

We don't want to have anything discolor the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I'll tell you, if we're afraid to ever mention it, if we're afraid to ever act like it's scriptural, those things are ready to die. We need to have the grace to talk about things that are hard to talk about.

Our hearts need to open up to each other. We gain discernment in those kinds of conversations. Strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die.

And I believe there's room in the kingdom of God for some variation. There's room for some differences. I believe God is flexible in some areas.

But I want us to know there is no room for the enemy. There is no room for deceitful workers to speak as apostles of Jesus Christ. We need some prophets among us to rise up.

Don't shut them down when they speak. Let God have His way. Because there's a line in the sand somewhere, brothers and sisters here at Charity.

There is a line in the sand somewhere where you exit the mind of Christ and you take on the mindset of America. There's a line in the sand somewhere. There's a line in the sand somewhere where you leave the church at Philadelphia and you join the church at Sardis because you have more liberty there.

I would like to say something this morning before I close about the temple of God. Because when I think about strengthening the things that remain, when I think about talking about the things that are hard to talk about, it takes the grace of God to do that. It takes an intense, fervent love one for another with fervent charity to do that.

But I want to say something about the temple of God. And that is that the temple of God is holy. The temple of God is holy, brothers and sisters, and we forget that.

But I tell you this morning, if you study the temple of God, you will find that God wanted to dwell with man. And the temple is where He chose to dwell. God is in His holy temple.

That is where God dwells. That's where the ark of God was kept. That's where the veil of the temple was.

That's where the mercy seat was. That's where the holiest of holies was the cherubims and seraphims was. It was in the holiest of holies in the temple.

That is where God revealed His glory. That's where the Shekinah glory of God filled the temple. That's where God dwelt.

God wanted to dwell with man. And God is extremely jealous over His holiness. He is extremely jealous over His dwelling place.

He is extremely jealous over His glory. His glory He will not give to another. He is jealous over it.

And if you look at the life of Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters, think about this, right there is the one and only, one and only thing in the life of Jesus Christ, the meek and lowly Lamb of God. That's the only thing that literally drove Him to inflict violence on other people was His jealousy over the temple of God. I mean, that's what it says.

The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up that rose up within Him and He went after Him. Jealousy over the temple of God, and brothers and sisters, that was the Old Testament temple. But I ask you, where is the temple of God today? It's us! Amen? I mean, we are the temple of God, and sometimes we forget that.

But that's the Scripture. Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost? There are some things that change from the Old Testament to the New, and that is one of them. The temple of God changed from a building to our body.

But I want to tell you something about God's jealousy over His dwelling place. It never changed one bit. It changed from a building to a body, but His jealousy over His glory and holiness never changed a bit.

And His desire to dwell in His temple never changed a bit. He wants to dwell within us, brothers and sisters. And we say sometimes, well, it doesn't matter how you dress.

It doesn't matter what you look like. It's what's on the inside that counts. That's all that matters.

But I want us to know this morning that when you dress your body with clothes, you are dressing the temple of God. That's New Testament doctrine. And we forget that.

And I mean, the temple of God in a low neckline? Seductive? God help us! The temple of God in the pursuit of money? God have mercy! The temple of God seeking entertainment in the places of this world?

The temple of God listening to worldly music? I don't think so! The temple of God with your haircut and your fashions after the ways of this world so that you can look like the world? The temple of God desiring to look like the world? I don't think so! Because the temple of God is holy. And God is jealous over His holiness. 1 Corinthians 3.16-17 says, Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? I want you to listen to this verse.

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. That sounds like Old Testament doctrine, but it's not! It's New Testament doctrine. Him that defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy.

For the temple of God is holy. Which temple you are, I tell you again, there's a point somewhere, there's a line in the sand where we leave the church in Philadelphia and we join the church at Sardis because they allow more things in the temple. Because they're comfortable with more things in the temple.

But brothers and sisters, you need to study Ezekiel 8 and 9 and learn there how the glory of God, the Shekinah glory of God was in the temple of God. And when enough other things of earth got into the temple, the glory of God departed. And do you know what the very next verse says? I'm going to read these two again, and then I'm going to read the 18th.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. And the very next verse says, let no man deceive himself. You know why that's there? Because there's a lot of people who have been deceived.

You know how they get deceived? Because the enemy has been transformed into an angel of light and he brings things into the temple of God that God does not want there. Let no man deceive himself. And we forget that, brothers and sisters.

There's a dying church. We'll forget that. But that's part of God's living challenge to us today is to remember and to repent.

God told the church of Sardis to remember. There in verse 3, it just says, Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard. And when we're told to remember, that's implying something.

That is implying that there is something that you once knew that you have forgotten. That's what remember means. It means you once knew this.

And so go back the road a little ways and take a look at where you took the wrong fork in the road. Amen? I mean, I do that. I do that there in Cleveland.

I remember in my mind the way it was when we came there. And that little old church house we were in, that old blue carpet, I mean, there wasn't a prayer room in the church house. Just a tiny little kitchen.

And I'm not remembering the building. I'm remembering who we were in that building. I remember praying all night long.

I remember washing feet at 5 o'clock in the morning. And shedding tears on each other's shoulders. Remember, there are things that have happened in this church house.

I don't know what they all are. But if you would go back and remember those things, and plead with God to bring us back to what He was doing then, do it now. Remember, that is part of the living challenge.

If a dying church will do that, it will bring them life. And when you remember, hold fast. Don't let go of it this time.

If it ever comes again, don't let go. That's what hold fast means. And repent.

You know, repentance may be one of the most practical words that I know. It's not a complicated word. It just simply means that if you're going this way, then stop and turn around and go this way.

That's what repentance means. If you're experiencing some coldness in your heart, if you're hearing the voices of the world, if you're growing cold in some area, stop. Do whatever it takes.

Stop eating. Get on your knees. Seek counsel.

Cry out to God. Take a walk in the woods. Let it all out to Heaven.

God is there. I believe that if we knew that God wants to pour out His grace, He wants to pour it out more than we want to receive it, brothers and sisters. I had a brother tell me one time that he had to learn to not make any more mistakes, to make any more mistakes, but he had learned how to walk in repentance.

He hadn't learned how to not take any more wrong turns, but he had learned the grace to stop when he saw he was going the wrong way. When he saw that he was feeling contentions in his strife, in his heart for his brother, he knew he was going the wrong way, and he had the grace to stop and humble himself and turn around and go the other way. That's beautiful.

If you find there's something stirring in your heart that feeds the wrong spirit, stop. If you're listening to a station on the radio and it feeds the flesh, just get off of that station. And the best way to get off is like this.

In closing, I would like to tell you, read to you what Paul said to the Ephesian elders. I would like for us to turn to Acts 20. Acts 20, verses 21-27.

I would like to read these. This is Paul with the Ephesian elders. This is when the church at Ephesus was a strong church.

This is when the church at Ephesus was an anointed church. This is when they were reaching out. This is when they had not left their first love.

They had it. Their eye was focused upon God. They were still hot for God and sanctified.

And they thought falling away from their first love was an impossibility. Here comes the Apostle Paul to the elders of this kind of a congregation. And this is what he says to them.

Verse 22, And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God shall see my face no more.

This is a farewell of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian elders. Wherefore, I take to you record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the gospel of God.

And I want to tell you, brothers and sisters, it's not easy to stand here and say things that you know is going to go against the flesh out there. It takes the grace of God and we plead for mercy. But Paul says, I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood. He had a burden for them that He could present them as a chaste virgin before God. Paul says, for I know this, oh, that we could let this be written on our hearts.

I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock. Grievous wolves that are transformed into ministers of righteousness. Grievous wolves that are transformed into the apostles of Christ.

The devil himself as an angel of light. Paul said, I know. After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise. There are some dangerous people right here speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch.

I tell you, that's part of the living challenge for a dying church. There it is again. The burden of the apostle Paul.

It is farewell to the Ephesian elders. Therefore, watch. And remember, there it is again.

There's another step of the living challenge. This was not the dying church. That living challenge, I tell you, if a dying church will do that, it will bring them life.

But I want to tell you this, if a living church won't do that, it will bring them death. Death of a vision. Therefore, watch and remember that by the space of three years I cease not to warn every one of you day and night with tears.

Then Paul kneeled down and they prayed. And they wept on his neck and they kissed him. I trust today we've not been offensive sharing our burden.

I don't want you to hear from man. I want you to hear from God. God has a work that He wants to do in this place.

I know that. I don't know the details. I just know that God has a work He wants to do everywhere.

And when we give Him liberty, there's a guarantee that comes when we give God liberty to do a work. Know what it is? He will always take it. He is here.

Hallelujah. He is here. Amen.

He is here. Glory. Glory.

I will bless His name again. He is here. Hear Him calling out your name.

He is here. You can touch Him. You'll never be the same when you answer to the call of God and respond to a living challenge or a dying church.

Take it personally. Take it collectively. Give God liberty.

We love you all. God bless you. I'd like for us all to stand.

Let's open the altar for everyone. Come. Just come.

God has spoken to you. Just come. I'm one that needs to be at the altar.

And I'm going to go. ...standing, patiently growing near. Be my calling.

Be without me. Be part of me. With me the stones are falling.

Amen. Open the door for me. If Thou wilt heed my calling, I will abide with Thee.

I would like to say something. There's a lesson that's somewhat hidden in the Word of God. You've got to dig a little bit to get it.

But we must get it. Because God has a message for us. And you're not going to get it unless you're under authority.

It's a lesson in the seven churches of Asia. God had a message for Sardis. It was a message so important that if they didn't get it and repent, God would take the candlestick out of its place.

God had the message. It was for Sardis. It was a message of utmost importance.

But God didn't send it to Sardis. He sent it to an old man out on a lonely island. Why did God do that? A message so important.

John couldn't even get off of the island. He was stranded there. He was in exile on Patmos.

Now he was going to have to write a letter. And God told him to write a letter. And God said, John, you tell them that this letter is from you.

And John did that. That's what he wrote down. John to the seven churches in Asia.

God hid Himself in that letter. It was God. John to the seven churches of Asia.

Now he was going to have to involve the mailman and he might not even be a believer. Now that letter was going to have to sail on a sinkable ship. Why does God take that kind of risk with a message so important that if Sardis didn't get it and repent, they would lose their place in the Kingdom of God? I'll tell you why I think God did that.

He did that because He is able to get the mail through if we're willing to receive it. But you'll never get the message if you're not under authority. Even when the letter got to Sardis, it wasn't to the people yet.

It was to the angel of Sardis. The messenger. I'm just going to say the pastor of Sardis.

And I thought, why didn't God just send a vision to everybody in Sardis so they had it direct from God? That's the way people are today. I want to hear from God. I mean, who is this John out here on this island? Amen? I'd rather hear from God! That's the way we are.

And if we're not under authority, we'll never get the message. I know the message today was brought through a fallible man. May God give us grace to have open hearts.

The mail will get through if we're willing to receive it. You may be seated. Well, I'm one of the pastors.

And I got the message. I hear, Lord. I hear.

And by God's grace, I want to fulfill my responsibilities and carry it to all the rest of the sheep. Because the Lord passed by this place this morning. There's no question about it.

And so I just encourage us all. I know God has been touching our hearts. God has been ministering to us in many ways.

God has been humbling our hearts. This is very good. God has again spoken to us this morning.

This morning, let us hear what the Spirit of God is saying to the church. God brought a man here who doesn't know anything about what is going on in this church. That's from the Lord.

So that we can see so clearly God is leading someone who knows nothing at all about us and addressing the very core of the needs in our congregation. And I receive it again today. That was a living challenge to this church who can die and someday be not here.

No matter what kind of reputation there is in the past, we are now living today. And it can die. It can die.

And be here no more. I take that. I take that challenge this morning.

I'm going to do my part. And I'm sorry. Where I have not been watching, I'm sorry.

But I take the challenge. And I know you do too. I know that.

I'm not by myself here this morning. Isn't that right? Did God speak to your heart this morning? Let us save our church. Each one of us.

Let us save our church. If God spoke to your heart today. Amen.

Those of you that have responded, if you have a desire to open your heart and share, we would invite you to make your way downstairs. If you want to go back to your seat, you're welcome to do that also. But I just would invite you to make your way downstairs if that's your desire.

We are at a fork in the road. We are at a fork in the road. We are.

But that's very exciting. If you choose the right fork. Very exciting.

Maybe the revival we've been praying for for two years. Maybe.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/14/SID14834.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dale-gish/a-living-challenge-a-living-challenge-for-a-dying-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net