

The Living and the Dead

by Richard E. Bieber

Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the necessity of genuine spiritual life in the church, as evaluated by Jesus, rather than by human standards or appearances.

Scripture: Matthew 24:42, Matthew 25:6, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, Hebrews 6:10, Revelation 3:1-3, Revelation 3:15, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Spiritual Revival", "Church Health"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of being spiritually alive and not just appearing alive in the eyes of others. He emphasizes that Jesus is the only one who truly knows the condition of believers and cares deeply about their spiritual state. Using the example of the Church at Sardis, he highlights three reasons why a church can be declared dead by Jesus: imperfect works done half-heartedly, forgetting what has been received and heard, and being spiritually asleep and unaware of God's work.

Transcript

read: Revelation 3:1-6

When someone comes along and says, "Man, the people in your church really have life; I can feel the power!", it makes us feel good. And when someone says, "Your church is dry as a bone; You're dead! Nothing's happening." we get a little angry.

There are always people who will take our pulse free of charge, and tell us whether we're dead or alive. But if the diagnosis comes only from them; though their eyes may be sharp, it amounts to nothing more than human flattery or human condemnation. There is only one person who knows the condition of any flock of believers at any given time... Only one.... Jesus himself.

In the second and third chapters of Revelation we hear him speaking to the churches of Asia. And to each one he says, "I know your works. I know where you dwell. I know what you're going through." He watches with intense care what is happening in each church, each body of believers on earth. He knows exactly where we are. He knows how serious we are. He knows how obedient we are. He knows when we are deceiving ourselves, getting lazy, when we're self-righteous. He knows when we're alive, and he knows when we're dead. And He cares.

Jesus doesn't let us wait with empty hands when broken bleeding souls from the world stagger into our midst. If we're about His business, He gives us power. When the enemy tries to confuse and discourage us and we're so bewildered we don't know which end is up, Jesus himself tell us where we are. He makes us to know what we need to know. And when we slip into indifference, when we get smug and start to die within, Jesus tells us. Even if it hurts our feelings. It has to be said.

Jesus declares a church to be dead or alive on a very different basis from the way most of us would measure these things. There are churches that seem to give some very impressive signs of life. There's enthusiasm there. They have decent crowds. The people seem to be in agreement with each other on everything from doctrine to politics. But if those churches would only listen, they would hear the Spirit of the Lord say to them, "You're dead! You look alive, but you're dead! You have a reputation, but you have no life."

And there are churches that the world walks by and doesn't even notice. They look like any other stuffy old church. Or they're branded by sensible Christians as a bunch of wing-ding fanatics. But the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands says, "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know you are bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary."

Let's say that the church we belong to has life. This is nothing to boast about or go around feeling proud of because this life doesn't come because of anything that we did. He gave it to us. He put the lampstand here and causes it to burn. But it is also save to say that the church we belong to doesn't have nearly the life it ought to have. The fire ought to be ten times hotter. The flame ought to be ten times brighter than it is. This is not His fault; it's ours.

It is so easy for us, because we have some life to look around and see churches that are almost dead and churches that have died completely, and feel that we're really getting somewhere. It is so easy to derive satisfaction out of looking at churches that appear to be nothing but clubs. They have a lot of members. They carry Bibles, own acres of real estate, own a fleet of buses, "but they're clubs", we say. What they are, whether they are dead or alive is not for us to decide. Some of these churches we think are dead may have life that we haven't even tasted yet.

The chief issue for us to worry about is, "What about the life of God this church where the Lord has placed us"? We are dead or alive, not according to how we think we compare with other groups. We are dead or alive according to what we are in the eyes of the Son of God, who knows our works. The life God gave us will stay only if we live it, do something with it, so that it will increase and bear fruit. If not, He will take that lampstand away again and put it somewhere else.

There was this church at Sardis that appeared to be doing pretty well. They had a fair number of people coming out. They seemed to have a good grasp of the doctrines. But Jesus looked at their works. "I know your works. You have the name of being alive, but you are dead. You're going on your reputation. You're looking back on the past. But what about now?"

The Church at Sardis was declared dead by Jesus for three reasons.

1. Their works were not perfect.

In other words, they were doing things, but they weren't doing them with a whole heart. The thing that makes our works perfect in the sight of God is not that they're flawless, but that they're wholehearted. When you worship God, you have to worship Him with your whole heart, otherwise it is not worship. When you tell somebody about Jesus, you don't pussyfoot. You don't mumble. You do it with joyful boldness. Otherwise, you might as well not open your mouth. When you go out of your way to help your neighbor, either do it with a whole heart, or forget it. Your daily work, whatever it is: do it to the praise, honor, and glory of the King with zeal! Do it well for His sake. Put in a good day's work, or it is dead as far as God is concerned.

"I have not found your works perfect in the sight of My God", said Jesus to the Church at Sardis. And so he says to many of us. "Too much slack in your living. Too many dangling ends. Too many things started in My Name and never finished. Too many promises made and not kept." These words do not come from some man who's trying to give you a hard time. They come from the One who finished his work for your salvation on the Cross at the cost of his lifeblood. his work for you was perfect. Jesus is not criticizing you. He is speaking to you in love. He is telling you this for your own good. He is calling you from death to life, from dead works to the true service of the living God.

2. The Church at Sardis was declared dead because it was forgetting what it had received and heard.

These people were going to church and hearing the word. Praise the Lord! Isn't it wonderful! We really got fed today! Then they were going out and forgetting. They never put it into practice.

"I didn't come into this world to boss people around and be served like a slavemaster", says Jesus. "I came to serve and give my life a ransom for many. And I told you that if you are to be my disciple, you must do the same."

And you said,

"Right on, Lord; That's what I'm going to do!" But you've never done it. You got the message six months ago and you still haven't taken the first step toward being a servant. You still want everybody to serve you! So now I'm calling you to remember. Remember then what you've received and heard. Keep that and repent.

Today the Spirit of Jesus is moving among us and causing us to remember certain things that we have forgotten. "I told you that your sins are forgiven. Now you've forgotten and are running around trying to work off your guilt, just as you did before. Remember what I told you. Look at My cross and remember. You're forgiven!"

"I told you to get that spite out of your heart, and you thanked me and said you would. But you never did. I told you that I'd take care of your material needs if you sought My Kingdom first. But you're still worrying yourself sick over tomorrow's bread. I told you to pay that debt. I told you to go to that friend and talk to him about me. I told you to start loving your wife. I told you to yield to your husband. I told you to start getting into this Word every day. And every day you forget."

How easily we remember the flattery and the lies that puff us up. How long we remember the wrongs that have been done against us by others. We're like elephants when it comes to remembering the people who crossed us, gossiped about us, insulted us, cheated us. But the words of the Master that are Spirit and Life are gone out of our mind's before we finish Sunday dinner.

Turn your memory over to the King today.

Let him wash all that crud out. So that, henceforth, it will carry only his truth. Remember what you have received and heard. Keep that and repent.

3. The Church at Sardis was declared dead by Jesus because it was asleep.

When you are asleep your eyes are shut. Your ears no longer hear what's going on. Your mind is floating out on the sea of the unconscious. If the truck driver is sleeping while his semi is humping, along at 70, if the nurse is sleeping while her critical patient is calling for help because she can't breathe, or if you go on sleeping when your bedroom is in flames, it spells trouble.

The Church at Sardis had lost touch with reality, with that war going on between heaven and hell. They had lost touch with God. They were no longer alert to the tricks of the Enemy. "If you will not awake, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you." You'll wake up then, but it will be too late.

Too many of us are asleep, just plain asleep to the things of God. Your mind is remarkably alert when it comes to saving a dollar or making yourself comfortable, or having something good to eat. But you're asleep to the one thing that matters. "Awake and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God."

It won't be long before that cry is raised, "Behold, the bridegroom is here: Go out to meet Him." Then those who are alive with his life will go out to meet him and those who are dead will fuss around and try to look alive. It will be too late. They will remain what they are forever.

Thank God that the midnight hour has not yet struck. The Son of God who died and behold he is alive forevermore and has the keys of Death and Hades walks in the Spirit among his churches, calling the dead to life.

Today as you read these words he is putting his finger on works in your life that he has not found perfect. He is reminding you of words he gave you, but you forgot. He is going to wake you up even if he has to shake you because he loves you and wants you to be inside with him when the door of the Kingdom shuts.

Whatever it is that he is touching in your life, whatever he is showing you that he wants you to do, do it.

He will give you victory, power, and life as you've never had life before.

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