

## **Sardis and the Dead (Who Don't Know They're Dead)**

Revelation 3:1-8

11-26-17

#8 in our series The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation

Peter Hiett

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we pray that you would help us to preach. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would cause us to see Jesus. Thank you that you have revealed yourself in Jesus our Lord. We call on your Spirit now to help us to see Him.

Revelation 3:1

*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: "The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. 'I know your works. You have the reputation [onoma: name] of being alive, but you are dead.'"*

A dead church . . . Have you ever been to a dead church?

Years ago, Susan and I got to visit Westminster Abbey in London. . . impeccable music . . . magnificent words . . . and astounding boredom.

We sat in the chancel, up front where everyone could see. *Three times*, during the sermon, Susan fell asleep . . . not a little—a lot. She literally fell over and slammed her head into the sideboard. The thud echoed throughout the entire cathedral.

Often times, the church I grew up in seemed dead. The sermons were usually boring in my estimation, and the preacher was my dad.

Have you ever been to an alive church? You know what I mean: it's exciting, growing and vital?

After leaving my home church, I moved to California for seminary and worked at Bel Air Presbyterian Church. It was the president's church, and it was filled with movie stars. And it had a name for being alive.

After that, I took a position in Northern California. Susan *never* fell asleep in church because the Senior Pastor was incredibly dynamic. (I'll call him Rick) He had published several books, was in high-demand as a speaker nationwide, and really fun to be around.

In 1991, he had just written a book on mentoring, and in the book I was the prime example. That was pretty cool. I was like the "mini-Rick" of Danville.

Rick had a name—a *great name*—for being alive, authentic and passionate. Sometimes while preaching, he would just break down weeping. People would say, "Wow, the Holy Spirit was moving!" "This church is so alive. Rick is so alive."

In the first week of September 1991, I ran into Rick by the dumpster, behind the church and next to our house. I would walk past the dumpster every day on my way back and forth to the youth house. You can learn a lot about people by hanging out at the dumpster.

The dumpster smelled, but it was where the action was: secret pastor meetings between services, grooms, and groomsmen sneaking beer before weddings . . . Dumpsters are often full of stuff that folks don't want you to see. A dumpster is metaphorical in a way; it smells like death but can teach a lot about life.

Well as I was saying, in the first week of September 1991, I ran into Rick by the dumpster. He used to sit back there in his car. He had been gone on sabbatical for three months, and this was his first day back. He had called an emergency staff meeting.

I had heard some rumors, so I went to his window and said, "Rick, what's up?"

He said, "Peter, I'm glad I caught you before the meeting. I've decided to resign. I'm too stressed and too busy . . . I want time to speak and write." Before I could catch myself, I said, "Oh good!" Then quickly, trying to recover, "I mean, good that it's not something bad." He chuckled, and said, "Oh you mean like a divorce or something?" Looking me in the eye he said, "Oh no. Nothing like that." He got out, and we walked together past the dumpster up to the meeting where he shared the same story.

A few days later, I was sitting in another meeting with some denominational officials who informed us that four women were suing Rick for using his position to obtain sexual favors from them during his last pastorate.

We then had another meeting with Rick. He confessed, wept, and promised there were no affairs like that in our church. I journaled about how beautiful his repentance was. A short time later, I was in another meeting and found out that his repentance was more lies—for he was still doing the same with women in our church, even as he wept in front of us over those women in the past.

About then I was also informed that the same thing had happened at Bel Air Presbyterian and had been happening the whole time I had worked there. It wasn't much later, that my old friend Tim—one of the best preachers that I've ever heard, he had a silver tongue with a great name for being alive—wrote a note to his big, thriving congregation and his young family, then went out to the garage and asphyxiated himself.

Dead. . .

Since then I've done two funerals for pastor friends who had a name for being alive and yet took their own lives—dead. I'm just saying I'm not so sure we're all that good at telling whether something is dead or alive.

Maybe we confuse growth with something just getting bigger . . . like a cancer.

[Image of Nazi soldiers carrying Nazi flags]

Maybe we confuse alive with shiny objects with lots of noise and commotion.

[Image of a flashy jet]

So we see something like this . . .

[Image of an open hand holding a mustard seed]

A dark little object in the palm of a gardener's hand, and we think: *"It's dead."*  
Maybe we are just not all that good at telling what's alive from what's dead.

We look and see lots of excited people, mighty works, and demons fleeing, and it all smells good. We say, "Man, look! That church is alive!" Then we see a few sad people, their numbers shrinking, no miracles, lots of tears – in a place that smells of dirt and demons. And we say, "Man, this place is depressing and that guy in the middle hanging on the tree. . . He's already dead . . . dead, dead, dead I tell ya... The man on that cross is dead."

I'm just saying maybe we just don't know dead, or alive as well as we'd think.

*"Sardis, you have the name of being alive, but you're dead."* Other folks called them "alive." And I'm sure they wanted to be named "alive." Sometimes just the name of being "alive" can kill you. A reputation can kill you. Jesus even said, *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you."* (Luke 6:26) "Woe to you that have a good reputation."

Rick told me later on, "It was the pressure of the ministry." I totally get that . . . but I doubt it was the pressure of the ministry that *God* gave him. I bet it was the pressure of living up to a name that everyone else gave him.

. . . And a name that he was trying to give himself.

. . . It might have even been a name that Jesus had given him, but he couldn't live up to the name by trying.

The letter to the seven churches has a chiastic Hebrew construction. That means the last three letters mirror the first three. Sardis is parallel to Pergamum. Two weeks ago in Pergamum, we preached that even a good name can kill you.

Remember how Peter tried to live up to the name that Jesus gave him? It just about killed him... and maybe in a way it did. He tried to make himself the Rock, until finally like butter, he denied Jesus three times. He realized that he couldn't make himself the Rock... and then he became the Rock on which Jesus built His church.

Jesus warned the folks in Pergamum: "Don't let people name you. Don't even let you name you." In other words, Don't concern yourself with a reputation. Your true name is

handed to you on a white stone, which no one knows . . . but Jesus. You can't earn it—that name. It comes by grace through faith. Trying to live up to a name can kill you. And making a name for yourself *will* kill you... or *already has* killed you. "You have a name of being alive, but you are dead," says Jesus.

My friend Gary found a man lying on the floor in the fetal position in a back hallway at a convention center where he had gone to hear a famous pastor with a name for being alive. The man was shaking and sobbing. He said, "I'm not making it." Gary bent down and said, "That's okay. You don't have to make it." The man said, "Yes I do. My name is \_\_\_\_\_." It was a name you'd probably know—the man with a name for being alive . . . about to tell everyone else how they can be alive too.

I have a friend who comes from a family of Evangelical Christian royalty. But living up to his name has been like a curse. He started out in professional ministry but would repeatedly act out in really bizarre ways . . . ways that I just could not understand, not particularly mean ways but vulgar ways, ways I couldn't understand . . . and I told him so

I was visiting this friend years ago in another state and went with him to one of his father's prayer support meetings. At this prayer meeting, we broke into "sharing groups." Everybody wore ironed blue jeans with sweaters over their shoulders tied in a knot in front, and they all said things like this: "Oh, bless you, brother." "I have experienced victory this week." "Isn't God good?" and "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!" The whole time they smiled. And my face hurt from pretending to be happy.

Finally, we said a little prayer because it was called a prayer meeting and then we left. When the two of us were alone, my friend turned to me and said, "So, what did you think?"

Now, I'm not saying this to be cute; I said it because I meant it.

I said, "To be honest with you, the entire time I had an irresistible urge to fart." My friend didn't laugh. He stopped me, looked me in the eye, and said, "Well, now you know. Now you understand what it is to be me."

I have heard counselors say that pastors have affairs often times just to get out from under the pressure of a good name . . . almost as a way to confess—I'm a white washed tomb, I look good on the outside but I'm dead on the inside and smell like a barn . . . or a manger.

I'm talking about pastors because I am one. But the same is true with business executives, teachers, moms, dads, church attendees . . . anybody who has a public life and wants to have a good public name. . . like presidents, congressmen, and Hollywood executives.

You've made a name for yourself, and you're working to live up to the name. But inside you're empty, tired, lonely, and desperate . . . You want someone—anyone—to know you, but you think, "*What if they really knew me?*" So you work harder to hide the stink.

What if all your good works were like soiled garments, garments just used by you to hide the stink? Like Isaiah says, “*all our righteous deeds are like soiled garments—filthy rags*” (Isaiah 64:6).

Maybe the evil one is committing extortion, saying to you, “Pay, work, struggle, strive for your name, for if they discovered that’s not your name—you’ll die.” So, you strive to live up to your name, but deep inside you long for the dumpster—the sewer, the bottle, the flesh, the porn, the gossip.

“The power of sin is the law,” says Scripture. “The power of sin is the knowledge of good and the desire to make yourself good.” Satan’s temptation is to make a name for yourself...

So, satan’s extortion is powerless without an addiction to a good public name. . . Which produces a desperate need to hide your shame in fig leaves and pride... You hide from the Truth in lies that you call your “self”—in a soiled garment you call your “self.”

The Lord said, “*In the day you eat of it you will surely die—(dying you will die.)*” You will hide from the Truth, who is the Life, who is Me—Jesus. You will hide from the Truth, in a prison you call yourself—a whitewashed tomb. It looks nice and it smells like a dumpster.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote, “If someone in public happens to pass gas loudly, people are so startled, it is as if it were the voice of a spirit. So intoxicated are we when we are in public.”

Well, maybe it is a spirit. Maybe it is the Spirit—the Spirit of Truth saying,  
“It’s dead in here and I want out of this tomb.”  
“It stinks in here . . . like a barn . . . or a manger.”  
I know that’s gross, but Christ is born in a barn and placed in a manger.  
It smells like a dumpster.

Revelation 3:1-6

*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: “The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. ‘I know your works. You have the reputation [onoma: “name”] of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete [perfect] in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come [“upon”] you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his*

*angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

So the message seems clear, doesn't it?

“Wake up! ...For I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.”

Jesus calls us to perfection! Are your works perfect? Perfect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Do people look at you and say, “Wow! That's life!”?

When was the last time you danced before the Lord in absolute self-abandon and joy?

When was the last time you led someone to the Living Christ?

When was the last time someone stopped you on the street and said, “Why are you so happy? How can you be so alive?”

[Peter begins to shout.] So look alive! . . . like Billy Graham, Benny Hin, . . . or Jesus.

Do you want garments white as snow? Do you want your name written in the Book of Life? Then Live! Live! Live! Or am I just screaming at dead things?

Now . . . Do you feel more alive?

Or do you feel more dead, imprisoned to the name of being alive?

A lot of yelling on the outside, but more dead on the inside?

The more I scream “Live!” the more you are reminded of how dead you are. And the more you are reminded of how dead you are, the more self-conscious you get. And the more self-conscious you get, the more dead you get! For Jesus was very clear: “*Lose your life* (your self, your soul) *and you'll find it.*” That means stop thinking about yourself.

I *said, stop thinking about yourself!* Now . . . are you thinking about yourself, not thinking about yourself, which is only more thinking about yourself? Which is to be trapped in death.

1 Corinthians 15:56 “*The power of sin is the law.*” You see?

We take law and it makes us dead.

We take knowledge of the Good, to make *ourselves* good and it makes us *not* good.

We take knowledge of Life and it makes us dead.

And worse still dead doesn't know dead, 'cause it's dead.

It's like the creepy kid in the movie *The Sixth Sense*, Remember? He talks to his counselor saying, “I see dead people. They don't know they're dead. They only see what they want to see.” They don't want to see the Truth. Jesus is the Truth.

We often wonder, “What's wrong with the world? What's wrong with me?” Perhaps you're dead and don't know you're dead—that would explain a lot. It would explain a lot . . . But screaming at you wouldn't do any good, 'cause you're dead. Have you ever

screamed at a dead cat? “Get up!” It doesn’t do any good.

If you’re dead, you can’t conquer? Dead things don’t conquer.

Each letter to the seven churches ends with this phrase: “To him who conquers I will give . . . I will do . . . such and such.” So I read and wonder:

Will I conquer?  
Will I revive that first love?  
Will I be faithful unto death?  
Will I renounce false teaching?  
Will I tolerate that Jezebel woman?  
Will I wake up and live?  
Will God blot my name out of the Book of Life?  
Will I conquer?

It could scare you to death . . . if you’re not already dead.

Like Saint Paul writes in Romans, “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came to life and I died—I died!—The very commandment that promised life to me proved to be death to me” (Rom. 7:10).

These seven letters sound a lot like law and the law brings death: “Do this or die. Conquer or die.” And it’s especially weird, considering this was written by John. When we preached through the Gospel of John (a few years ago), over and over we were struck by the fact that Jesus does everything! He calls people, chooses people, saves people, sanctifies people...

He lives His life through people. So in John 5:21, Jesus says, “*Whoever does what is true comes to the light—which is the judgment (v.19)—so that it may clearly be seen that his deeds have been done **by God**.*”

But here in these letters . . . it sounds like he’s saying, “*Do these deeds or God will be done with you—He’ll blot you out of His book.*”

What is Jesus saying to us? Well technically, He’s not talking to us. We are overhearing Him talk to someone else, the way John overheard Jesus talking to God the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.

John is writing down what Jesus is saying to someone else. Each letter is addressed to an angel and ends with this phrase: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches*”

Most of the pronouns in the letters are second person singular pronouns that get lost in

translation. So when Jesus says, "*I have not found your works perfect,*" He is talking to the angel. That's really weird, for . . .

1. In Scripture, angels are good or bad, but this angel gets *rebuked* for bad things and *commended* for good... utterly bizarre. And Not only that, but the rest of the New Testament teaches that we don't need some angel mediating our relationship with God. There's one mediator—and that's Jesus.
  2. Some have postulated the angel is a bishop or a prophet or some person in the local church because *angelos* means "messenger." But that puts a whole lot of ungodly pressure on these seven guys—pressure to save the churches—And there's only one savior and that's Jesus.
  3. Neither "angel" nor "man" works, so some see it as just an unprecedented, bizarre, literary device. Yet Jesus seems to make a very big deal of these seven star messengers held tightly in His hand.
- Seven messengers, yet one.
  - Seven is the number of God's manifold fullness.
  - In chapter five, the Lamb has seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
  - Seven spirits, yet we know that's one Spirit—the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus.
  - Rev. 1:20 we read: "*The seven angels are the seven stars.*"
  - Rev. 3:30 We just read, "*The words of Him (Jesus) who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.*"

Some commentators say that the "and" is epexegetical, so this verse should be translated, "*The words of him who has the seven spirits, that is, the seven stars,*" which then, would clearly mean what the Revelation seems to mean—that the seven eyes of the Lamb, that are the seven Spirits of God are also the seven stars, and the seven stars are the seven angels.

Which means that each angel, in each church, is Christ's Spirit in each church . . .

So, Jesus is talking to His own spirit—the Holy Spirit—residing in each member of His body in each church—His body.

So, of course, He knows their works.

And of course, Jesus says to His Spirit in a way that the church can overhear, "*Let him with ears to hear, hear what the spirit says to the churches.*"

The Spirit is called the *parakletos* the Counselor, the Advocate, the Helper. He is the light in each lampstand. Now, it seems so obvious, but I haven't read a commentator who says this—and as I've thought about it I realized why. It would mean that Jesus is like blaming His own Spirit for our sins (for losing our first love, for tolerating Jezebel's *pornea*, for being dead).

- It would mean that Jesus is like not imputing our sins against us, but Himself.
- It would mean that Jesus had died (or at least His Spirit) and is now calling to Himself in us . . . to rise and to live.



- It would mean that He is charging His own Spirit with the work of our own righteousness, sanctification, and redemption or salvation and creation.
- It would be a Grace almost too incredible to believe, and we'd even need help believing it; even faith would be a gift.

Yet, this is just what Scripture asks us to believe: *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"* 2 Cor. 5: 19 (NKJV). So, if the Lord wasn't imputing them to us, was He imputing them to someone else? YES! *"For He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor. 5:21 NKJV).

God was in Christ, doing this. So, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are doing all of this for us!

In I John, John says, *"If anyone does sin [and of course we know "all have sinned..."] we have an advocate* (a helper—remember Adam couldn't find his helper and Scripture says our helper is God) *with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* 1 John 2:1b.

Jesus gives us His Spirit, who is called "the advocate"—the *parakletos*

It means "one who pleads another's case before a judge."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, *"I'm sending another advocate. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."* (John 14:16-17)

Then He tells the disciples, *"The Advocate, the Helper, The Spirit of Truth will teach you all things. He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak."* (He takes direction from Jesus and speaks it to the church.)

*"He will declare to you the things that are to come... And he will take what is mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:13-15).

The letter goes to the angel in the church. A church is a sanctuary made of people filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus says, "You're dead." "You" is singular, not plural, which means He's talking to this Angel, which must be His Spirit. He says, "You are dead." And now that raises a fascinating question...

If Jesus is "The Life"... and the book of Hebrews calls Him "an indestructible life."

If Jesus is "The Life," how can He die or His Spirit die?

Maybe He can't die unless He dies in us...

And maybe death isn't the absence of life, so much as the separation of life from Life.

You know the Breath of God—that is the Spirit of God and Spirit of Truth and of Life—that Spirit was in Adam when Adam believed the lie, and so cut himself off from the Truth and the Life, covered himself in fig leaves, and was exiled from the garden.

I mean maybe the Breath of God, Spirit of God, and Spirit of Jesus lies in the dark soil of each and every human heart like a seed, which at one point was taken from the tree Life and buried in the ground that is you... until Jesus calls to His own Spirit saying, *"Awake oh sleeper, rise from the dead and I will give you Light."*

I don't know . . . but I do know that each of us is like an earthen vessel, in which God plants a seed, which is faith, and that our earthen vessel must crack and eventually be discarded for the seed to grow, and reach the Light. That earthen vessel is your flesh. You've grown that flesh based on a lie that you must make yourself in the image of God, that you must make a name for yourself, and so you've made a false self. A false self in which your true self is imprisoned like a seed.

Perhaps death is separation.

So, to say Christ died is to say Christ was separated from Christ . . .

As if a drop of life was separated from the river of life and placed in you . . .

As if a crumb of truth was broken from the body of Truth and planted in you.

Just like body broken and blood shed are planted in you at the table of the Lord.

Your true self is like a bit of Christ's self, planted in the earthen soil that you think of as you. So, maybe the Spirit on the throne calls to the Spirit in you saying, "Live, live, live!" And the Spirit in you, can hear the Spirit on the throne . . . and rise from the dead, like a seed that grows, and breaks through the ground in which it is encased. . . or a Savior that bursts from a tomb that used to be your soul.

I don't know how to describe it, but we die with Him and He rises in us, crying "*Abba Father.*" Life is communion with God.

Perhaps death is separation. And the death of death, the second death, is communion.

So *Yes!*... In these letters, I think we hear Jesus calling to His own Spirit buried in our faithlessness, shame, and isolation. He calls "***Live, live, live!***" until "*it is no longer I that lives but Christ who lives within me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.*"

It means that you are like a field prepared for harvest. Or a womb prepared to give birth to you. You are like a patient on an operating table overhearing the Great Physician talk to Himself about your surgery. If that's the case, what should you do?

Hold still and surrender . . .

Surrender your "self," your false self, your ego.

Surrender whatever is dirty or rotten... especially any infection or sin.

Surrender, hold still, and see the Salvation of our God.

Conquering, then, depends on the Physician.

So, "Will the Physician conquer? Will Jesus conquer? Will the Advocate conquer?"

Well, that's what the rest of the book is about! It's a Revelation of Jesus.

But "Will your name be blotted from the book of life?"

I suppose that depends on your name.

In Exodus 32 Moses tries to atone for the *people* of Israel saying to God,  
"*If you won't forgive their sins blot me out of your book*" and God says,

*"Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book."*

Wow! That means that only one name has not been blotted out of His book; it is He who knew no sin, but became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.

In Revelation 20, we'll read about the Great White Throne Judgment, which is *the* Judgment, for according to John there is only *one* Judgment.

In Revelation 20, the dead stand before the throne. The dead are judged by what is written in the books according to the deeds that they have done.

The books are like a resume. I think they are the record of our attempt to make a name for ourselves—our attempt to justify ourselves according to the law in the power of our own flesh. The books are opened and another book is opened, which is the Lamb's book of life. It contains names that have *not* been earned with *deeds* done in the flesh. But names that *have been given by grace* through the blood of the Lamb.

In verse 3 Jesus said to the Angel in Sardis,  
"Remember what you received and heard. *Keep it.*"

If folks had received the name "alive" from Jesus because He had given it to them;  
If they had received the name by grace through faith and this not of themselves . . .  
If they were grateful to God for the name . . .  
THEN they should *keep it*. That's a name in the Lamb's book of life.

But if they received the name from themselves or their neighbors because they sang extra loud, attended every bible study, acted bubbly, or even cast out demons and healed the sick in Jesus' name . . . if the name was a reputation they thought they'd earned with deeds they had done . . . if they were proud of the name . . . *then* they better beg Jesus to cut the name from their flesh with His sword, lest they be thrown into the fire with it.

*"Then death and hell were thrown in the lake of fire. This is the second death"* (Rev. 20:14). *"And death shall be no more"* (Rev. 21: 4).

The Lake of Fire is the death of death, and death is separation.

The end of death is a sea of Life, and Life is communion.

The end of darkness is a sea of Light.

The end of the false is a sea of Truth.

The end of pride is a sea of burning hot humility.

The end of sin is a sea of Grace.

The end of the thing that you used to refer to as your "self" . . . is God's self.

The end of Hell, is communion with God.

Revelation 20:14 *"This is the second death."*

Revelation 20:15 *"Anyone's name not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*

And anyone not thrown into the lake of fire had already been baptized in fire like the disciples were baptized at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is Fire. That's the Judgment.

And now, I think the Lamb has written the name of every person He created in His book. But not the name of the person He didn't create—the person that you think you create.

You have an old self, an old man, a false self and he is not found in the Lamb's book of life. And you have a new self, a true self in communion with Christ's self; His name is written in the Lamb's book of life written in blood.

That's the Judgment

Anytime you confess your sins and receive God's grace . . .

You have surrendered to God's Judgment.

You have put off that old self and begun to live in the new self.

You have died and begun to live.

You have faith by Grace and this not of yourself.

You have the victory that has conquered the world—1 John 5:4

*"This is the victory—our faith."*

You have renounced the name that you have made for yourself...

And begun to receive the name that God is giving you.

You have stripped yourself of your soiled garments . . .

Washed them in the blood of the Lamb . . .

And allowed Him to dress you in His righteousness—Himself.

In verse 3 Jesus said, *"Remember and repent.. or I'll come like a thief."* He may come *like* a thief, but He's not a thief, and you won't think He's a thief if you've already surrendered yourself to Him. You'll hear: *"Wake oh sleeper and rise from the dead and I will give you light . . . I am the light"* (Eph. 5:14). And surrendering to Him, won't be terror but delight. In fact, it's in the place of surrender shame that the seed is planted. It's in that stinky barn that the Christ Child is born.

That's the Judgment.

*"Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

- Sardis, stop trying to make a name for yourself.
- Sardis, surrender the garbage, and the Life will be born in your stable, and I will give you a new name; it's my name.

Shortly after my encounter with Rick, behind the church by the dumpster, I went for a walk with an old man. He was a pastor. His last ten years had been really hard. . . He'd never published a book and never pastored a church with much of a name. In fact, he'd lost two churches, and much of his reputation. Yet, I'd have to say that it was in him, more than in anyone else I've ever known, that I had *encountered* love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith, and self-control . . . in places most

would've lost control. I had encountered life in places full of dirt, darkness and maybe even demons.

I don't mean he was perfect, but those things were *real* . . . not just a name. He took me for a walk, and I remember we sat down by the dumpster on the steps out behind the church. He said to me something like this: "Peter, I just want to tell you that I haven't been very on fire lately—alive. I have been kind of dead." Then he said, "I want to recommit my life to Jesus, and I'd like you to pray for me."

Feeling utterly unqualified or worthy to do so, I did. I prayed for my dad.

The Spirit in me called to the Spirit in him, "*Live! Live! Live!*"

For thirty years the Spirit in him had been calling to the Spirit in me, "*Live! Live! Live.*"

I think that's the only reason I could pray, saying, "*Live! Live! Live!*"

And he did, and he does.

My dad died thirteen years ago . . . And yet he's the only person I've known that I'm convinced is truly alive. I'm not saying that for philosophical or theological reasons but for experiential reasons. After he died, at least four people that I know encountered him alive . . .

One he told to have hope.

One he liberated from a bondage.

One he told to come and give me a hug.

And lastly, he told my wife "Susan and Peter don't be afraid to drink the cup the Lord has for you." Susan said to me, "Peter you should have seen him. He looked so alive."

I've known a lot of pastors with the name of being alive who were awfully dead. My dad didn't have much of a name, and he confessed to feeling dead, and I know he's alive. Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead.

Once upon a time, Jesus had a reputation for being dead, but He alive.

He is "*the* Life." That's His name and He gives it to you. You cannot earn it. He must give it, and you must receive it.

That's the Judgment of God.

### **Communion**

This is the Judgment of God. He took bread and broke it saying "This is my life given to you." And He took the cup saying, "This cup is the covenant in my blood." For thousands of years, God had been telling the Israelites: "The life is in the blood." And Jesus said, "Drink of it all of you."

Would you pray with me? All of you? Pray: "I confess that I have tried to make a name for myself. The name of being alive and then I realize I'm dead. I confess that in and of myself, I'm dead. I surrender the dead to you, for you are the Life. Thank you, that you

have given yourself to me. And you are giving me a name—your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you're proud of your name and think you've earned your name, listen to the Judgment of God: That's not your name. But if you're grateful to God for your name—that is your name and it's Jesus' name, and it's the Judgment of God.

### **Prayer**

Lord God we thank you! Lord Jesus, we thank you that you who knew no sin became sin so that we might know the righteousness of God. Lord God, I thank you that what you will is called reality, and the Word that you will with is Jesus. That Word will not return void but will accomplish that for which it was sent. Thank you that you will make us in your own image and your own likeness and we will love you with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We will love our neighbor as ourselves. We will be home. Thank you, Lord God, for who we are in Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Benediction**

Everyone likes practical application points so there's a very simple practical application point today. Confess your sins one to another. That's what Scripture says. I confess my sins to Susan (my wife), first and foremost. I confess my sins to Andrew (who is kind of like my brother) and I confess my sins to my small group.

Now, don't confess them to just anybody. I think that's what Jesus meant when He said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine," but you need to have someone you confess your sins to. So, if you confess your sins to that person, their job is not to say, "You loser! Get your act together; you better try harder." God is not calling you to an accountability group because what is that? That's the law. And the more people say those kinds of things the more you think about your "*self*" and get stuck in your "*self*." What is their duty at that point? It's to proclaim the Gospel, and what does that sound like? "My dear, that is no longer your name. It's been nailed to Jesus and born to destruction and He gives you a new name, and it's your true name." That's called the Gospel.

Now, you may have to deal with county officials, the police, and you may not be able to babysit again . . . but that's not your name. And Jesus rises in you and gives you life. It's the Word of God that descends in you and makes you a new creation.

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel! Amen.

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*