



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

April 9, 2017

Jump Start # 1806

Revelation 3:4 *“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.”*

I referred to this passage Sunday. It has been something that has stayed with me. It's something that I have seen and I know the answer, but I still can't understand it. Sardis is the church that had a name. They were known to be alive. They weren't. Christ states that "You are dead." A lifeless church. A dead congregation. Their name didn't match what they were really like. What others thought about them wasn't the way it really was. God knows. They were dead. Faith gone. Going through the motions. Few goals. Just keeping house. Little concern. No improvement. No hope. Stuck. Stale. Stinkin'. That's Sardis.

All except for our verse today. There were a few who were not dead. There were a few who the Lord called worthy. Unlike the rest, they were doing things right. They had hope, faith and joy. They were trying. They put their all into what they were doing. The faithful few.

Here is what's so amazing about all of this. Most of us have read these verses dozens and dozens of times. We are not comparing the dead at Sardis with Ephesus. Nor are we comparing the dead at Sardis to what was going on at Philadelphia. There was death at Sardis but there was also life. We are talking about what was going on at the same place. The dead and the alive were at the same place, at the same time. We are not talking about a before and after picture. Same time. Same place. Same worship services. Same songs. Same prayers. Same preaching. Same leadership. Same classes. Some were dead and others were doing well. It's not that the dead were kept from these spiritual things. It's not that the dead were not fed at all. Everyone in the congregation had the same opportunities, the same chances.

How is it that some at the same time and in the same congregation can be dead, while others are doing well? This is what's hard to understand. We are not talking about some who were under privileged and never had the same opportunities as the others did. They did. Something didn't work for them. Death and life within the same congregation. That has to be a concern for those that preach. That has to be a concern for shepherds in a congregation. How can some be doing well while others are dying?

First, we may put too much emphasis upon congregational worship. Sure there existed the same songs, same prayers and same preaching, but something inside these hearts was not the same. While some worshipped, grew and pleased the Lord, others, died. We point fingers too often to the type of songs, the style of the preaching, the topics of study-trying to find a reason and a blame why some die. Be careful with that.

For at Sardis, you have some who were doing well.

(OVER)

Second, our faith must be lived beyond the walls of the church building. Congregational worship is very important but what about our private worship? What about our faith and walk with the Lord Monday thru Saturday? Ours is not a faith that can be turned on and turned off. It must be in us. Christ must be our life. The death of anything comes about because of disease and a lack of attention to what is necessary. If you don't water a house plant, it will die. If you don't feed your pet, it will die. If your pet becomes ill and you don't take it to the vet, it likely will not do well. The same with children. The same with us. The same with our faith. Faith dies when we ignore it. Faith dies when we no longer feed it. Faith dies when we allow it to be overtaken by the cares of the world and the errors of Satan. Did these dead at Sardis discuss Christ outside of worship? Did they pray at home? Did they make choices based upon their faith? Did they fellowship with other Christians? Did they do the very things necessary to grow faith? It doesn't matter who is preaching, Sunday worship isn't a multi-purpose vitamin that gives me 100% of my daily spiritual requirements. That's not the purpose of worship. If that is all I'm giving my soul, then I am slowly starving spiritually. Do things spiritually. Help others. Read and study and share with others. Have wonderful discussions outside the church building about Christ. Use your faith. Walk by faith. Feed your faith.

Third, our faith doesn't die quickly. A person doesn't lose their faith by a blowout. It's generally a slow, slow leak. There are signs. It's there if you notice them and want to notice them. Less talk spiritually. Less interest spiritually. More sleeping during worship. Less prayers at home. Less wise choices. More worldly talk. More worldly friends. Days filled with the here and now and less on the eternal. Superficial things dominate. A little leak. In time, that leak gets bigger. Now, the one with the dying faith starts complaining about things among brethren. He is moving away and is feeling guilty, so he points out their flaws to make himself feel better. They aren't friendly he says. The sermons are boring. The classes don't do much for him. He doesn't want to be around other Christians. More and more he finds that he has more in common with work friends and neighborhood friends than he does with those he is supposed to be in fellowship with. He is dying and he doesn't even see it. He puts on a good show. He'll still be at worship on Sunday, but worship is not what he's doing. He has less and less in common with those who are spiritually alive. He's moving the opposite direction. They are pleasing the Lord and he is disappointing the Lord. They are growing and he is dying. Not much to talk about these days. Not much to do together. Death and life-and all in the same congregation.

Fourth, what can be done? God provides the answer here in the context of Revelation 3. Nothing is said about finding another church. Nothing is said about changing preachers, getting new elders or a zillion other external things that we most often apply to an internal problem. God has the answers. He always does. Three things that surround the letter "R".

REMAIN: Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Take care of that which is about to die. Complete your deeds. Take action. Do something. I have on several occasions seen a person take their final breath. I watched my mother as she died. I have been there for others. We sit. We watch. We wait for death. Physically, we understand this. Spiritually, we too often do the same. We watch a marriage die. We watch a family fall apart. We watch a faith slip away. There are things that can and should be done. Strengthen what remains. Don't pull the plug on that faith. Shore up what you can. Get into the book and study God's word. Get serious. Faith is built and sustained by the word of God. Get that Bible into your heart and soul.

REMEMBER: Remember what you have received and keep it. Plug up the leaks. Don't lose any more ground. You know what is right. You know what you once believed. Remember?

REPENT: change. If you continue on the current path, you are headed to the spiritual cemetery. A dead faith will not save you. You can convince yourself that you are doing right by worshipping, but if there is no activity on the inside, it's not helping you. Repent. Make changes. Make changes in how you worship. Make changes at home. This current path is leading to spiritual death. You will lose your soul. You will be a Christian in Hell. You will be asked, "What are you doing down here?" You won't have an answer. There is no answer to walking away from Jesus.

All of this comes down to personal responsibility and taking ownership of our souls. The very choices you make will help you or they may lead to more leaks in your faith. It doesn't have to be death. You are not destined for that. It's your choice. You have to want to be in Heaven. You have to want to please the Lord. Don't wait until Sunday. Ask the Lord to help you, TODAY.

Death and life in the same congregation.