

Reference: REV 3:1-6

Church: GRACE

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An Appearance of Life

Purpose: To show the dangers of a good reputation based on outward judgment.
To emphasize the need for the Word to be central in the church

1. Introduction

Sardis - had been very rich - 1st to mint gold & silver coins
Magnificent & strong citadel built on a hill
Also became known for pride & presumptuous arrogance
Cyrus - surprise attack at night - captured it in 549 BC
Romans did the same in 218 B.C.
Ruined by a great earthquake in 17 A.D. & never recovered
History of destruction coming as a thief

2. Reputations can be dangerous

Sardis had a reputation - they were alive
People talked approvingly of it - a lively fellowship
"There's lots of life there!"
Probably lots going on, numbers growing.
No obvious immoralities: not rebuked for tolerating Jezebel
Probably had sound teaching: not rebuked for heresy

What is the danger for a church in this situation?
Not making any enormous waves
Gaining a reputation
Grow proud. Congratulate ourselves. We've arrived!
This was the mistake at Sardis - dropped their guard
Grew smug and complacent
Grew content with what they had become
Relatively wealthy – few material needs
Respectable – no open scandals
Sound – meeting all the appropriate standards

Could we fall into a trap like this?

3. Appearances can be deceptive

The Lord doesn't look on outward things
Numbers, wealth, absence of immorality, sound teaching, lively services - all may give name for life but may be false signs.
Sardis had dead works - empty - not "filled full" (vs2)
Hypocrites - had a reputation but were dying from within
The Lord could see decay and creeping death
Before men their works looked good
Before God they were dead
Dirtying their clothes - soiling their profession of Christ
Worse than Pergamum or Thyatira

What about us - how do we judge churches?
Do we judge on liveliness of services (rather than heart of worship)?
On numbers?
On amount of activity? (rather than motivation for it)
On correctness of doctrine? (rather than on the extent to which it is lived out in the congregation)?
Some people do! These are their first considerations!
Big name preachers - that's so-and so's church!
These are the obvious things – lie on the surface
We need to judge church life as the Lord does
Look for increase in **spiritual fruit** - filled up works
works of faith, works of love
Attentiveness to and obedience to the Word
These are the marks of a living fellowship

4. How had problem come at Sardis?

4.1. Peace, Prosperity and self-satisfaction

No threat from false teaching, persecution, immorality
Complacent and self-assured
Affected by the complacency of the people around
No great material needs

Drowsy & unaware of their plight - wake up!

We need to be careful - in some ways we live in such times
 People around us are careless, self-assured, complacent
 We must not allow their attitude to affect us
 Watch and wake up - be on your guard

4.2. Word no longer central

7 spirits - the Holy Spirit - bringer of life (vs 1)
 7 stars - elders through whom Spirit works by **Word**
 Had to remember HOW they received and heard (vs 3)
 How? Through preaching of the **Word**,
 How? repenting, believing and obeying wholeheartedly
 They had to guard this receiving and hearing, keep it and repent
 Maybe had great sermons but didn't hear the message – easy
 Never received the Word
 Looking in the mirror & then forgetting

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it -- he will be blessed in what he does.

Liked the preaching for its own sake?

Ezekiel 33:30-32 "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' 31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. 32 Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. (NIV)

Didn't combine message with repentance, faith & obedience.
 The Word was not powerful with them

Can see same dangers in the USA church
 Churches seem to be alive; Numbers, activity, Lively worship

Presumption that all is well and that God is blessing
 But too often there is also letting go of the Word
 Either by not receiving the message correctly
 (thinking that having sound preaching is enough of itself)
 (but lacking of true repentance, faith and obedience)
 Or by squeezing the Word of God out
 (Preaching devalued - even abandoned altogether)
 How shall we respond?
 We want growing numbers, activities & lively worship!
 (although must realise that God's power is not always shown in
 noise & activity - be still & know, still small voice etc.)
 AND filled up works, real life, true faith and obedience
 We must guard Word, repent, believe and obey from heart

5. Judgement comes on complacent churches

Judgement will come if they don't wake up
 He will come to them for judgment
 As a thief - suddenly, to rob and steal and destroy
 (and this happened in Sardis)
 We must be careful or the same will be true of us.
 Implies many in Sardis were are not the Lord's at all
 Indeed if they persistently refuse to listen to Him, this must be true
 His sheep hear His voice and follow Him
 Do you? Are you following after Him?
 Intent on hearing His voice and readily obeying?

6. Amazing grace of God

A few **names** have kept themselves clean (vs 4)
 We are known and observed by name!
 They shall walk with the Lord in heaven, spotless (vs 5)
 Worthy, but only because made so by Christ
 He makes people worthy, then rewards them for it!
 3-fold reward for overcomers:
They may wear the same robes dressed in white in heaven
I shall not erase his name (vs 5)

Does this mean some may have their names erased?

Does God write in, then erase, then write in again?

No - speaks of solid assurance of salvation

If we are truly His, we are safe forever,

we shall not soil our garments!

Is your name in the Book of Life?

I will confess them before my Father

Matthew 10:32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (NIV)

Hebrews 2:11-12 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." {Psalm 22:22}

7. Conclusions

We must be on our guard -

Not judge by outward things - these are spiritual matters!

Life seen in increasing fruitfulness

Not revel in a good reputation with men

It is what the Lord thinks that counts!

We must give the Word its proper place

We must repent, trust and obey

We must receive and hear

Then we shall be overcomers and shall walk in white!

May the Lord help us all to do so