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Sermon Notes

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Sardis: Warning to a Dead Church

Revelation 3:1-6

When John MacArthur preached on this tragic church of Sardis, he used a powerful illustration... one that I have never forgotten. He spoke of the concept of distant starlight. Physicists tell us that light travels at a constant rate, 186,000 miles per second. Because the universe is so vast, cosmologists have invented a unit of measurement called a "light-year", the distance light travels in a year. Doing the math, a light year is 5.88 TRILLION miles... because stars are so far from the earth, it takes distant starlight many years to travel to the earth. So the light of every star that twinkles in the night sky was actually sent toward earth many, many years ago... looking at starlight is looking back in time. The stars that make up the Big Dipper range from 78 to 123 light years from Earth. So that means, the next time you stand and look up at the Big Dipper, you are looking for the most part at starlight that began its journey over a century ago.

What that means is that it is possible that some of the stars in the Big Dipper NO LONGER EXIST! They might have gone dark fifty years ago, and we wouldn't know it for another half century. The Big Dipper is shining with a past glory... a glory from a bygone era.

That is how it was with the church at Sardis...

Revelation 3:1 I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

They were living on PAST GLORIES, past reputation... and they were walking around with the appearance of life, but they were actually DEAD... a DEAD church.

It's not much different from taking a tour of an archaeological site in the Greek or Roman world and seeing the architectural evidence of the glory of a past era, the Parthenon or Acropolis of ancient Athens, or the Coliseum of ancient Rome... evidence of a vigorous, wealthy, powerful empire still living off the reputation of deeds achieved long ago

“Appearances can be deceiving” ... that is a well-known phrase... but nowhere is this more true than in the spiritual realm, in dealing with the genuine spiritual state of both individuals and churches

It is possible for an individual person to APPEAR to be alive spiritually, but actually be dead. The Puritans called such a person a “gospel hypocrite”. The word “hypocrite” is actually directly descended from a Greek word meaning ACTOR... when it comes to the Christian gospel, it has to do with someone who acts righteous, but inside is spiritually dead

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

The same can happen to a church... it can be living on past reputation of spiritual vitality, but inside is nothing but spiritual deadness

Christ's words to this dead church stand as a timeless warning to all churches in all places at all times... any church can turn from a vibrant witness, and healthy doctrine, and a loving community to a church devoid of life

And that church might still be known far and wide as a “great church”, but like Samson shorn of his hair, he didn't know his power had left him. So also this church at Sardis did not know that their reputation had far outlived their spiritual life

All over the country, previously vibrant local churches are dying or have died. This is a major issue in the American church scene today.

One poll shows that between 8000 and 10,000 local churches die every year, while only about 1000 new churches are planted every year

WHY do so many previously flourishing local churches die?? That is a question that today's passage will lead us to consider...

Thom Rainer wrote a book called *Autopsy of a Dead Church*... it stands as a warning to living churches to, as Jesus said to a small remnant within this dead church:

Revelation 3:2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

This morning, we are going to do the sad work of walking to a cold morgue, of seeing the coroner pull out the corpse of the church at Sardis, and describe how the church died

We are going to look into the dead face of such a church so that we can be REVIVED ourselves, REVITALIZED, renewed in our zeal for Christ

We are going to ask the Lord to search us and know our hearts and show us if spiritual NECROSIS, spiritual death is starting to creep in... we are going to be moved with a healthy fear of this happening to FBC and we are going to, by God's grace alone, seek to avoid the fate of the church at Sardis

At least, that is my prayer.

The most powerful tool in the hands of Almighty God for the advance of his Kingdom and the spreading of his glory is a healthy, gospel-preaching local church. Satan knows this, and therefore, he is constantly at work trying to KILL local churches that are assaulting his dark kingdom.

We need to study why churches die, and even more, how they live, so that FBC can continue to be a weapon for the glory of God in the salvation of lost sinners.

I. Christ Describes Himself: Holding the Seven Spirits and the Seven Stars

A. These Are the Words

1. As with every church, Christ seeks to remedy the church with his WORDS

Revelation 3:1 "These are the words..."

2. The link between Christ's words and spiritual life is obvious throughout the New Testament... perhaps especially in these places

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 5:25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

John 6:63 The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

3. In the same way, Jesus yearns to SPEAK LIFE into the deadness of Sardis

4. It reminds me of the powerful image of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones:

Ezekiel 37:4-10 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-- a vast army.

5. It is only by the WORDS of Christ that the spiritually dead come to life

B. Him Who Holds the Seven Spirits and the Seven Stars

Revelation 3:1 These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

1. In every one of these seven letters, Christ addresses the local church with some aspect of the vision John had in Revelation 1
2. Christ is the resurrected, glorified Son of Man, dressed like a holy priest, walking among seven golden lampstands, holding in his right hand seven stars
3. This is a clear picture of Christ's constant, vigilant, active ministry to every local church that assembles in his name around the world, and in every generation of church history
4. Christ ACTIVELY KNOWS and CARES ABOUT each of his churches
5. He describes himself to each church with words that the church needs to know, that are appropriate to that church
6. Here, he focuses on his HOLDING OF the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars
7. The "seven spirits of God" must refer to the Holy Spirit
 - a. This designation also appears in Revelation 1 in the Trinitarian greeting:

Revelation 1:4-5 Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,⁵ ¶ and from Jesus Christ,

who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

b. And again in Revelation 4-5:

Revelation 4:5 Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

Revelation 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

c. These terms show very clearly that the “seven spirits of God” must be the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity

d. Why is the SOLITARY SPIRIT called the “seven spirits” of God? Perhaps a better translation would be the “seven-fold” spirit of God”...

e. Some scholars link it to Isaiah 11:2

Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD

f. In other words, it is seven effects of the Spirit’s ministry in the world... the number seven is the number of perfection; so the Spirit that produces a perfect and pervasive and powerful effect in the world

8. The Church at Sardis is DEAD, as we shall see in a moment... but the essence of that spiritual deadness is the lack of the visible ministry of the Holy Spirit

9. The Spirit gives LIFE, by the Spirit a congregation is breathed into existence and powerfully lives and moves for the glory of God

10. A Spirit-filled church is ALIVE, crackling with energy

a. The Word of God is powerfully proclaimed

b. The worship of God is energetically flowing

c. The Fruit of the Spirit is obviously seen

d. The Power of the Spirit is upon them for the bold proclamation of the gospel

e. All of these things are produced by the Spirit

f. It is the Spirit of God who alone can REVIVE a dead church

g. It is because the Spirit of God was GREIVED and QUENCHED that the church went from being alive to dead in the first place

11. How does Jesus “hold” the Seven-fold Spirit of God?

a. Christ is directly linked with the Spirit in every way

b. Christ is the MESSIAH (Anointed One) because of the Spirit

i) That passage in Isaiah 11 was speaking directly of Jesus, saying the Spirit of the Lord would rest on him

ii) So also this powerful prediction

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

iii) And this assertion

Luke 4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

Acts 10:38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

c. Jesus said he would pour out the Spirit... the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son... it is the gift that Jesus gives to his people

Luke 3:16 John [the Baptist] answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

d. Jesus HOLDS the seven-fold Spirit in his hand not because he OWNS him but because he is his to give, his to pour out

12. Jesus also “HOLDS” the seven stars

a. These stars probably represent the pastors of these churches

b. Jesus holds them in his right hand

c. The faithful ministry of a godly preaching pastor PLUS the outpouring of the Spirit of God, this ALONE can revive a dead church

- d. A godly, powerful pastoral ministry and the active power of the Holy Spirit, this is exactly what this church at Sardis is missing

C. So Who Was this Church at Sardis?

1. No direct knowledge of how the church at Sardis came to be
2. Many scholars think it was planted as a part of Paul's fruitful ministry throughout Asia Minor based in Ephesus

Acts 19:9-10 Paul took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

3. The City of Sardis had an illustrious history in the past, but had experienced major reversals... just like the church itself
 - a. Sardis was founded around 1200 B.C. and had become one of the greatest cities in the ancient world
 - b. It became the capitol of the stunningly wealthy Lydian kingdom, culminating in the wealth of their most famous King, Croesus
 - c. Sardis was built near a river that literally flowed with gold, the Pactolus River... archaeologists have found hundreds of crucibles in the ruins of Sardis... crucibles are used for refining and purifying gold
 - d. Archaeologists tells us that gold and silver coins were first minted in Sardis
 - e. The city itself was located 30 miles south of Thyatira in the fertile valley of the Hermas River; it was built some 1500 feet above the valley floor, and the hill on which it stood had smooth, nearly perpendicular walls on three sides, making it all but impregnable... the only way to approach the city was from the South along a steep narrow path which was easily defended by watchful sentries
 - f. This seemingly impregnable location, however, made the people of Sardis overconfident... they supposed they could never be conquered
 - g. BUT they were conquered twice; first, by Cyrus the Great in 549 B.C, when the overconfident Croesus, assuming Sardis was safe, went to bed with the Persian army besieging him... skillful climbers scaled the walls and conquered the city... the same thing happened again in 195 B.C. when Greek general Antiochus the Great employed a single sure-footed mountaineer to lead the army in by an unknown route while the overconfident Lydian army watched in the wrong direction

- h. Sardis had been destroyed by a severe earthquake in A.D. 17, and the Emperor Tiberius had relaxed the tax burden so the city could recover
- i. In John's day, the city of Sardis was prosperous but its glory was long past... like the church, it had a reputation that greatly outstripped its reality

II. Christ Diagnoses the Church at Sardis: You Are Dead!

Revelation 3:1 I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

A. The Diagnosis is Shocking: YOU ARE DEAD

B. Jesus Looks at their Deeds and Knows they are Dead!

Revelation 3:2 I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

1. There are a set of works that show life

John 15:2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit

Matthew 21:19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, Jesus went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

2. The works of a healthy church are obvious
 - a. Clear, powerful proclamation of the word of God from the pulpit
 - b. Vigorous, Spirit-filled worship
 - c. Committed, sacrificial, loving community among the people
 - d. Bold, consistent proclamation of the gospel, not fearing the consequences
 - e. Sacrificial ministry to the poor and needy
3. Jesus has a set of works in mind for each person and each church

Ephesians 2:10 "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance, that we should walk in them."

4. Sardis had not completed their mission... they had stopped working for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel of Christ

C. They Had a NAME of Being Alive, But Were Actually Dead

1. The church at Sardis had a reputation... literally a NAME of life

2. Perhaps they had done many of those works in the past
3. But those past heroes were now all gone
 - a. I have visited the churches of many of my heroes in the faith
 - b. I have seen the pulpit of John Calvin at St. Pierre's Cathedral in Geneva, Switzerland
 - c. I have looked on the Wittenberg Door where Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses, and have stood in the church where Luther preached his final sermon
 - d. I have visited the church at Northampton Massachusetts where Jonathan Edwards helped begin the First Great Awakening
 - e. The days of those heroes in all those localities is OVER... those churches may have a reputation, a name from the past, but those heroes are dead and those days are over

D. Why Were They Dead?

1. Cause of Death is Always the Same: Sin

Romans 6:23 the wages of sin is death

James 1:14-15 each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

2. Specifics are not as important as the state
 - a. Christ says nothing about false doctrine here... although that may have been a problem
 - b. Christ does not mention Balaam or the Nicolaitans or Jezebel
 - c. There is no mention of persecution (one commentator said "Why would Satan persecute a harmless dead church?")
 - d. But the mention of immorality is a key clue:

Revelation 3:4 you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

- e. Perhaps many of the same problems with these other churches had happened to Sardis... immorality, persecution, false doctrine, leading to laziness and lethargy and coldness and loss of passion for Christ and for souls

3. Little by little, spiritual vigor can go out of a local church
 - a. Godly leaders get old and die
 - b. The next generation does not live with the same zeal and holiness and passion as the previous one did

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

- c. The world can start to encroach with its relentless appeal to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life
- d. The church can choose to stop preaching the clear gospel of Christ to the surrounding community or to alter certain offensive aspects of the message
- e. The witnesses can fear persecution—whether beatings or imprisonment or maybe merely economic disadvantages and start to make compromises

E. Thom Rainer's *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*

He listed his own post-mortem analysis of deceased churches

Meditating on his list and adding my own insights, here would be my list:

1. The church lost its zeal for local outreach... they became insular and cared more and more about what made them happy and peaceful... they lost the willingness to suffer for Christ
2. The church turned its back on solid and careful teaching of the Word, and chose to tickle the ears of its hearers instead of building them up in the truth
3. The church ceased disciplining sin, but tolerated more and more worldliness in its members
4. The church ceased praying together
5. The church stopped developing godly men as leaders
6. The church spent most of its resources, its time, energy, money, on itself rather than on the spreading of the gospel
7. The church became more and more worldly in appearance, and fit in with the surrounding culture in key moral issues

8. The church became more and more listless, lifeless, cold in weekly life—not much going on, especially in worship
9. The church clung to traditionalism, celebrating the bygone era of great moments in the past; it built memorials to the founding fathers and mothers of the church, and celebrated that bygone era; patterns of ministry and church life that had long outlived their usefulness were cherished and clung to with angry fervor
10. The church shrank and shrank in number; fewer and fewer converts, fewer and fewer young people; the church trended upward in age

III. Christ Commands the Remnant: Wake Up!

Revelation 3:2-3 *Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.*

A. Wake Up!

1. Many times, death is likened to sleep
2. There is no dead person that Christ cannot awaken by his sovereign power

Revelation 1:18 *I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

3. All Christians were at one time dead spiritually, even while we lived

Ephesians 2:1-3 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

John 5:25 *I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.*

4. When Christ calls to the dead with sovereign resurrecting power, they come to life

Mark 5:41-42 *He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

John 11:43-44 *When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* ⁴⁴ *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

5. But it is not clear here that he will do that
6. Rather, when the deadness is self-inflicted because people who claim to be Christians have backslidden from the healthy Christian life, Christ is calling on them to PUT OFF the deeds of death, the defilement of sin, and walk with him out of their self-imposed tomb
7. There is at least some sense in which this command is different than what he gave to Lazarus

Revelation 3:3 *But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief*

B. Strengthen What Remains and is About to Die

1. There is a small remnant of true believers in this dead church

Revelation 3:4 *Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.*

2. They are not blameless, for they have been part of the slide into deadness
3. BUT they have managed to keep from the defilement that characterizes the rest of the church
4. They are WORTHY, meaning they are genuinely born again
5. They will WALK WITH CHRIST IN WHITE... an ongoing life of purity and holiness, in addition to the renewed call on their lives to be strengthened in the Spirit
6. They are in danger... if they do not repent, they will die like the rest
7. They are weak, but still alive
 - a. Picture someone who's been in a serious accident and they are bleeding
 - b. Their lifeblood is flowing out of them slowly
 - c. They are not going to die within second, but their life force is draining away
 - d. They must attend immediately to their spiritual health
8. What strengthens weak and dying Christians? The WORD and the SPIRIT!

C. Remember and Repent

Revelation 3:3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.

1. Just like the Church at Ephesus, restoration begins with memory... remembering past vitality, not in some nostalgic way, but so they can resume doing the works Christ wants
2. They should remember specifically the word Christ had spoken to them in the gospel and repent of their slide into spiritual death
3. OBEY IT and repent... the issue here is obedience to the word that was preached to them
4. Saturate yourself again in the gospel... of a holy and powerful God who created the universe; of a human race created in his image that has willfully turned their backs on him and violated his holy laws through sin, that deserves to die physically and eternally; of a Savior, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, born of a Virgin, lived a sinless life, did mighty signs and wonders, died an atoning death on the cross, was raised from the grave on the third day, and of the need for simple repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins
5. This is the gospel... remember it, repent, and obey its message!!
6. Start being the church again... walk in the good works that God has prepared for you!

D. Warning:

Revelation 3:3 But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

1. Jesus threatens them in a way very similar to his teaching about the Second Coming

Matthew 24:43-44 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

2. This is not threatening the Second Coming, but his direct action against them... perhaps like the other churches already mentioned

[Ephesus] Revelation 2:5 If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

[Pergamum] Revelation 2:16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

3. Like Ananias and Sapphira, they might suddenly drop dead
4. Or perhaps, they will just have the little life left flicker out and they will die, like so many other congregations have since that time
5. The time is NOW to remember the word, repent, and obey!!

IV. Christ Promises Rewards to the Overcomers

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

A. The Overcomers are Rewarded

1. As we've seen in every one of these letters to the seven churches, there are rewards to the ones that OVERCOME... to the conquerors
2. Life is a battle, and it will take courage and perseverance to overcome
3. We are "More than conquerors" through him who loved us and died for us, and through the Spirit

B. The Overcomers are Rewarded with Garments of White and a Lasting Name

1. Garments of white = purity, holiness, through the atoning blood of Christ... ALSO willingness to suffer for Christ

Revelation 3:18 white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness

Revelation 7:13-14 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

2. The church at Sardis had become dead because they retreated from powerful bold witness for Christ

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

3. Jesus is calling on the church in every generation to live boldly for his gospel, not seeking to preserve a comfortable existence in the world of the pagans

C. A Name that will Never Be Blotted Out

1. The church had a NAME (reputation) that they were alive but they were dead
 - a. That shows they were far more concerned about human opinion than God's
 - b. They lived for an earthly name that would perish, and meant nothing on judgment day
 - c. Christ offers them something vastly better
2. If they hear his voice and overcome by faith, they will receive a lasting name that will be spoken throughout eternity as genuine followers of Christ
3. Jesus says he will never blot out his name from the book of life
 - a. We should not imagine for a minute this means people can lose their salvation
 - b. There is no verse anywhere that teaches that people can have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and then are later blotted out, erased from that
 - c. Rather, this teaches the OPPOSITE... genuine believers will NEVER BE FORGOTTEN by Christ

Isaiah 49:16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands

4. More than that, Jesus will actually speak his or her name before his Father in heaven

Revelation 3:5 I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

5. Imagine Jesus not ashamed to speak our names to God and to the angels!!

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Hebrews 2:11 Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Hebrews 11:16 God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Christ is promising the overcomers the joys of eternal glory in heaven, of a reputation that Christ will be pleased to narrate in heaven to the Father and to the holy angels

This is something that has to be WON by faith-filled overcoming!!

V. Applications

A. Be Fearful and Fight Deadness!

Every Individual Christian Needs to Stare at the Topic of Spiritual Decline... of sliding into deadness, and plead with God to reverse that slide!

John Bunyan's Steps to Apostasy (Pilgrim's Progress):

- You draw away your thoughts from the remembrance of God, death, and judgment to come.
- Then, you slowly stop private duties like closet prayer, curbing your lusts, watching for temptation, sorrow for sin, and the like.
- Then, you turn away the company of lively and warm Christians.
- After that, you grow cold to public duty, as hearing the word preached, reading the bible, godly fellowship, and the like.
- Then, you begin to pick holes in the coats of some of the godly; and do it maliciously, that you may have a seeming excuse to throw [the Christian] religion (for the sake of some sin you have seen in others) behind your back.
- Then, you begin to adhere to, and associate yourself with, carnal, loose, and immoral men/women.
- Then, you give in to carnal and immoral discourses in secret; and you are glad if you can see such things in anyone else that is called Christian, that way you can commit your sin more boldly through their example.
- After this, you begin to play with little sins openly.

And then, being hardened, you prove yourself to be as lost as they are. Thus, being launched again into the gulf of misery, unless a miracle of grace prevent it, you perish forever in your own deception.

B. FBC: Understand Deadness Can Happen to Us

We need to consider again the marks of a dying church and fight and pray against it

We need to not be complacent, like Croesus was when Cyrus the Great came... he felt he could just go to sleep and not worry about it

Listen again to the marks of a dying church:

1. The church lost its zeal for local outreach... they became insular and cared more and more about what made them happy and peaceful... they lost the willingness to suffer for Christ
2. The church turned its back on solid and careful teaching of the Word, and chose to tickle the ears of its hearers instead of building them up in the truth
3. The church ceased disciplining sin, but tolerated more and more worldliness in its members
4. The church ceased praying together
5. The church stopped developing godly men as leaders
6. The church spent most of its resources, its time, energy, money, on itself rather than on the spreading of the gospel
7. The church became more and more worldly in appearance, and fit in with the surrounding culture in key moral issues
8. The church became more and more listless, lifeless, cold in weekly life—not much going on, especially in worship
9. The church clung to traditionalism, celebrating the bygone era of great moments in the past; it built memorials to the founding fathers and mothers of the church, and celebrated that bygone era; patterns of ministry and church life that had long outlived their usefulness were cherished and clung to with angry fervor
10. The church shrank and shrank in number; fewer and fewer converts, fewer and fewer young people; the church trended upward in age

Let's plead with God to reverse any of these tendencies in ourselves

We need to be REAL, not hypocrites!

A genuine zeal for personal holiness coupled with a courageous pattern of evangelism and sacrificial spread of the gospel through missions to the end of the earth... if these things are ours in increasing measure, we will not die but live! We will be fruitful for the glory of Christ

C. Rely on the Holy Spirit

1. Jesus has the Seven-fold Spirit in his hand
2. As we see aspects of deadness creeping into our church, we need to fight BY THE SPIRIT
3. Two keys: personal holiness and bold evangelism (internal and external journeys)
4. Holy Spirit does BOTH
 - a. Sliding into unholy secret practices of sin is the quickest way toward spiritual death...

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die;

The Spirit is given to make us holy:

but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live

- b. So also the Spirit is able to make us bold witnesses for him in Durham

Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses...

D. Come to Christ!

1. We have been speaking of the danger of a church like ours dying
2. For you, if you are not a Christian, the far greater threat is your own eternal death
3. I am calling on you to hear the gospel of Christ and believe it
4. I just gave you the basic facts... God... Man... Christ... Response
5. Come while there's time!