

Revelation 3:1-6 "Wake up!"

Read Revelation 3:1-6

1. When we think of an "alive" church, what sorts of attributes or characteristics mark them? Are these truly marks of the kind of life Jesus is looking for?

We often think of alive churches as those that have a mixture of ages, of races, those that have a blossoming Children's and Youth programs.

We think of alive churches as those that are "relevant", that speak into the realities that we are practically facing.

We think of alive churches as those that play music that reflects current cultural tastes and trends.

We think of alive churches as those that focus on the positive qualities of faith in God and don't speak to matters of judgement or sin or repentance.

We think of alive churches as those that draw a crowd, because who doesn't like being part of a crowd.

You could have all of these things and not have the fullness of spiritual life. The signs of an inner spiritual life would be a deepening in holiness (becoming more like Jesus). We would see the community deepening more in the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. We would see our laying down our lives, our time, our resources for the sake of others offering practical love and care for members and strangers alike. You would see a deepening depth of intimacy with God and an increasing trust in him for all things.

2. The church in Sardis had the reputation of being alive, but Jesus' analysis was that they were dead. In the sermon Tim gave some reflections from the archeological discoveries in ancient Sardis. Christians marked their shops with crosses, but those same shops also contained pagan symbols. A Christian church was uncovered on the far end of the temple to the fertility goddess kibbulah. It appears that they were mingling the worldview and cultural idolatries of their city with their faith in Jesus. What are some of the elements of our worldview and cultural idolatries that we intermingle with faith in Jesus in the contemporary church?

In the sermon Tim mentioned two.

That as a culture we worship money. We pursue it, protect it, grow it. We have many of our hopes and our fears animated by money. We so often tie our sense of joy, of happiness, of peace, of security in money. There is a belief that pervades the contemporary church that it is God's job to bless the faithful to give all that the world has to offer and also a deep life of faith.

As a culture we worship individualism. The individual has the right to define for themselves their own truth, mortality, and freedom. We choose how we define ourselves, what we do, who we are.

We enshrine the rights of the individual in our laws. No one, not family, not community, not culture is able to infringe upon our rights. In the church this often gets worked out as a me and Jesus spirituality. My emotional response to worship is key. We often choose churches based on our individual consumer felt needs. We expect that Jesus will direct us in our lives independent of how he has instructed humanity throughout history by his word.

There could be many others to consider. Another to perhaps spark conversation...

In postmodernity truth is relative. Every truth claim is considered a power play. The contemporary church has often laid down truth claims in favour of "relevant" teaching. The question of the age is not "is it true?" but "does it work?" Sermon titles like the "7 steps to the best marriage" "3 principles for joy" etc. abound as we seek to relativize truth in accommodation of a self-help marketplace.

3. If we recognize the condition of Sardis in us this text gives us a lifeline. A chain of linked commands that give us a way back. Wake up, strengthen, Remember, Keep, Repent. What do you think each means and which do you think would be the most important for you to put into practice personally?

Wake up. First we have to recognize that there is a problem. If things are going well we aren't looking for anything to be wrong. We aren't on the lookout for something that could undo the vitality of our faith.

Strengthen. There is some vitality left, find it and work on it. In particular (vs. 4), there were some within the community who hadn't soiled their garments, who hadn't mingled faith in Christ with cultural idolatries. Follow their lead.

Remember. Remember first what you received. This verb is used primarily in the scriptures to refer to the reception of the Holy Spirit. Remember that you have received the very life of God. Also remember what you heard. You heard the good news of Jesus, what his death and resurrection accomplishes in you. You have heard the nature of his advancing kingdom.

Keep. Hold onto the gospel. Hold onto the Spirit. Don't grieve the Spirit, quench the spirit, lose ahold of the Spirit. Live in step, in obedience to the gospel and the conviction of the Spirit. Where you have let go...

Repent. Turn around. Leave one way of being and enter into a whole new way of being.

The question of most important would be up to the participants of the group. Part of the desire of participation in a small group would be that we can hold one another accountable, pray for one another, encourage one another in the journey of faith. This question will give you such things to support one another in and may be a helpful place to begin your prayer time for one another.

4. What are the promises that Jesus gives to those who heed his words, and how might they enable us to let go of everything but Jesus?

Garments of white. White garments could mean many things. Garments of festivity – that we will be guests at the heavenly eternal feast. Garments of Victory – that we will participate in God’s final victory over sin, injustice, and the devil. Garments of purity – that reflect our single-minded devotion to Jesus and Jesus alone. Does our life now match our eternal attire?

Name in the book of life. In the ancient world King’s kept in a book a record of the names of their citizens. Crimes against the state and death would get your name blotted out of the book of life. Our name in his book of citizenship in the kingdom is secure because of his grace. Is our life now consistent with our true citizenship?

Jesus will confess our name to the Father. He will speak to the Father on our behalf – speak the words over us – well done my good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:23). He is not fearful to call us his own and to express his pleasure in us – why are we so fearful to name ourselves Christ’s own and live a life consistent with that reality?

5. True life is a gift of the Spirit. The vision of Jesus that is given in the first verse has him holding not only the fullness of the Spirit but also the fullness of the church. How can we as individuals and as a community be more open to the fullness of the Spirit’s enlivening?

Prayer. Yearn for his work in our midst.

Be more open to the fullness of the giftings of the Spirit. At our retreat this past fall we spoke of the three categories of gifts of the Spirit. Love gifts, word gifts, power gifts. At times we can get out of our own discomfort, our own giftings, fashion an environment where we quench the Spirit’s work in our midst.

Follow the Spirit’s leading through the daily decisions of life.

The Spirit’s work is primarily to reveal Jesus to us. Where our focus is on Jesus we are in step with the work of the Spirit in our midst.