

THE SPIRIT'S WAKE-UP CALL (Revelation 3)

What would be your reaction if a visitor to your church said, "I see right through your work. You have a reputation for vigor and zest, but you are dead, stone dead. You are all talk and no action. You are all style and no substance. You are all appearance." I think you would be most offended, in fact, shocked, and even angered. Then, before you could say anything in reply, he went on to say: "Up on your feet. Take a deep breath. Maybe there's life in you yet. But I wouldn't know it by looking at your busy work; nothing of God's work has been completed. Your condition is desperate.....If you pull the covers back over your head and sleep on, oblivious to God, I'll return when you least expect it, break into your life like a thief in the night." (Rev.3:1-3, The Message) Wow. What a wake-up call for the Christians in Sardis.

What if that visitor were Jesus, and he meant: "Wake up to your true condition. Don't live off your reputation. Don't be self-deceived. What you think you are and what you are is quite different." Churches that live off their reputation slowly die and eventually disappear. They may appear strong, but they are undermined by becoming comfortable with the culture in which they live. They are lulled into sleep by their compromises and accommodations, by their assimilation into the world view of their neighbors and unbelieving friends so they are no different, and they have no distinctive mission. How does this happen? How does a church or a Christian believer start with clarity and conviction, and end up going along to get along with the world and their community?

The famous 12th-century theologian Thomas Aquinas called on Pope Innocent IV one day and found him counting money. The Pope, by way of apology, said, "You see the Church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none;'" "True, Holy Father," answered Thomas, "nor can she say to the paralytic, 'Take up thy bed and walk.'" "As riches increase, that close dependence on God, which is the fertile soil of faith and trust, decreases. It is when we are most straightened [financially stretched] in ourselves that the bounty of God is most widely opened to us; it is when we have nothing that we find the key with which to enter in and possess all things which are ours in Christ." (A.J. Gordon)

Wealth can lead to self-satisfaction. Jesus portrayed a rich man saying to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you." (Luke 12:19) Affluence can lead to blindness about spiritual needs. "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin." (Hosea 12:8)

The Spirit of Jesus said to the Christians in Laodicea: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." (Rev.3:17)

Contrary to those who preach the prosperity gospel, that God's will is that all Christians should be financially prosperous, Jesus taught that affluence can lead to spiritual poverty, and that material wealth can blind us to our real needs. Those who earn more than \$150,000 a year are more likely not even to believe in God. For when you are materially secure you feel that you don't need God. (Christian Century, June 16, 2009, p.13) The more prosperous a nation becomes the more indifferent its people become toward God. They shut out God from their life experience. The more a government borrows or prints money, to pay for obligations, the more it creates the illusion that it is the fount of all blessing, and becomes idolatrous.

The Laodiceans are representative of church people who are lukewarm in their faith. They are neither cold nor hot; neither one extreme nor another; neither passionately committed to Jesus nor coldly formal and rationalistic. They want to do the right thing. They want to do good. They want to be known for their good works, as long as it doesn't inconvenience them or cause them too much sacrifice. They have become comfortable with their culture. They don't want a change of any kind. They are content with their situation and have put up "Do Not Disturb" signs. What is Jesus' reaction to the lukewarm Christian? Not very polite or tactful. It makes him sick. "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Rev.3:16)

Lukewarm Christians don't realize that they are spiritually wretched, spiritually pitiful, spiritually poor, spiritually blind, and spiritually naked. The Spirit urges us to seek true spiritual riches - treasures in heaven which cannot be taken away from us by time and circumstances -gold which is found refined in the fire of suffering. It is only when we are willing to put our lives on the line for the values of the Gospel of Christ that we can become spiritually rich, receive the clothes of salvation to cover our shameful, sinful nakedness, and receive the healing medicine for our eyes so that we can see our genuine needs.

These seem to be harsh words, but they are motivated by a heart of love. "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline." (Rev.3:19) Jesus loves us enough to go to the Cross for us, to suffer and die for our sins, to gain the right to tell us the truth, the true reality about our lives. The Lord is hurt when we shut him out of our lives by our preoccupation with ourselves and our neglect of his presence. He wants to live in us and with us so that we might be truly enriched by, what St. Paul calls, "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph.3:8). He wants to change our spiritual condition and usefulness so that our lives mean something and will accomplish the purpose for which we were saved. To do that, we must choose to invite him into our lives every moment of every day. "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev.3:20)

Jesus stands at the door of every life, of every church, of every nation,

tribe, and people, knocking for admission. For the door of the human heart to be opened to the one who is called "God's Yes, the Faithful and Accurate Witness, the First of God's creation" (Rev.3:14, The Message) you have to hear his voice, you have to listen and respond with the genuine desire to welcome him into your life, your hopes, and your concerns. He holds the key to entry into the kingdom of heaven. Open the door. Invite him in. Don't shut him out.

The Christians in Philadelphia were different from the Laodiceans. They had kept the Word of Christ in their lives. They had not shut him out of their relationships and activities. As a result, Jesus gave them an open door that could not be shut. There was no barrier between them and him. They could enjoy continual fellowship and communion with him. He was there for them all the time because they welcomed him into every aspect of their lives, private and public. Consequently, they would be able to be kept safe when the time of testing came in their lives, as it does to all of us at one time or another. They would be victorious conquerors and their names would be written in the book of life. And so can we. So can you. So can this nation.

None of us wants to be caught napping on duty. None of us wants to be thought dead or lukewarm. None of us wants to shut out the Lord of glory. Surely we all want to open the door to his presence and power in our lives. Let us hear what the Spirit says to us.