

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018  
**Services:** 730, 930 Tewantin and 930 Peregian  
**Series:** 7 searching letters  
**Passage:** Revelation 3:1-6  
**Title:** To the church in Sardis  
**Outline:** Authority  
What's good  
What's not  
Action  
Encouragement

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**Reputation** is important. /

For an **organisation** – for a **business** – for a **charity** – **reputation** is **significant**.

Just last week, it was revealed that the charity **Oxfam** was involved in a **sex scandal**... how much of it is true I'm unsure – but regardless, the **reputation** of **Oxfam** has been **damaged**.

The **reputation** was one thing. The **reality** turned out to be something **else**.

Once an organisation's reputation has been damaged it's never easy for it to be restored.

Same on an **individual** level... when an Olympian or cyclist or other athlete has been discovered using banned substances, their reputation is **so** damaged that they lose previously won **medals**, lose **sponsorship**, lose the right to take part in the **sport** again – or at least for a **time**.

**Reputation** is **significant**!

And for the **church** – the **worldwide** church – the **Australian** church – our **reputation** has taken a **battering** in recent years...

Once with a reputation of being the **upholder** of society's **morals** and **values**... a reputation for doing **good** – a reputation for **representing** – **speaking for** – **God**... an organisation whose ethical views were **sought** by **government**...

Now – we live with a **damaged** reputation – so much so that we're seen as **irrelevant** – even **morally bankrupt**... // to some people – we're **dangerous**!

Going to be hard to win that **back**... // Don't know we ever **will**! //

And I can't help but wonder whether this letter to Sardis actually addresses the issue behind all the **other** issues and challenges facing the church...

... I wonder whether it may be true to say of the **Australian church** – “you have a **reputation** of being **alive**, but you are **dead**?” //

Well – that is by way of introduction. We are going to follow our usual pattern here.... and see why Jesus has

1. **authority** to speak

We'll see

2. what's **good**? ...in the church at Sardis
3. What's **not** – what does Jesus condemn in this church...?

What's the call to

4. **action**

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And finally, what's the word of

5. **encouragement**...

so first – how is Jesus described here in term of his:

**1. AUTHORITY**

Have a look with me – v1 – *these are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.*

Well – we won't need long here – because we've explored this in part in our first and second sermons in the series...

The **seven spirits** – 7 being the number of wholeness and completeness... so this refers to the Holy Spirit – Jesus described himself as **holding** the seven spirits – because the Holy Spirit – is the Spirit of Jesus himself...

So he **holds** the **Spirit**

...and he holds the **7 stars** – and we saw in Ch 1 and 2 – that the stars of the church were the **messengers** – they bring the light (hence stars) of the **Gospel** to the **church**...

And he holds the **messengers** in his **hand**... he has a hold on those who **proclaim** the good **news** and teach his **Word**...

And *because* he holds the **Spirit** and the **messengers** – then he claims **authority**...

**2. WHAT'S GOOD?**

well that's not going to take us long – because the answer is – **nothing**... there's **no commendation** here – only **condemnation!**...

- so let's go straight to:

**3. WHAT'S NOT** (so good)

Have a look with me – half way through v1 – *I know your deeds; you have a reputation for being **alive**, but you are **dead**.*

The only '**good**' in Sardis, is a good **reputation!**

a **reputation** however, which does not represent **reality!**

Jesus' verdict on her is **devastatingly brief**: in **name** she is **alive**, in **fact** she is **dead**. //

Is this why the church at large has lost its way?

Is this why the church in the **western** world **today** is for the most part going **backwards**...??

...losing **numbers**... **influence**... **impact**...

...losing **finances**, **clergy**, **lay leaders**...

...losing **young people**, **children**, **families**?

Is **this** why the church in the western world is now spending large amounts of its vast wealth to compensate victims of **sexual abuse**?

Is this why out of the **23 diocese** in the Anglican Church of Australia, at least **5** are no longer **financially viable**?

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Is this why some clergy were able to use their **position** to take **advantage** of **young people**?

Does the **church** of Australia today have a **reputation** for being **alive** but it is in fact **dead**?

You can hear the **protests** can't you?

**Dead?** We're not **dead**...

- Just look at our **beautiful buildings**
- Hear our **lovely choirs**
- Look at our **elaborate robes**
- See what **good** we do through **Anglicare**
- See the **schools** we run
- And look - we have **messy church** once a month in **lots** of **places**...
- And we're very **tolerant** and welcoming of just about **anyone**.... ///

...but is the church **reaching** people?

...are we seeing people come to know **Jesus**?

...are there any **signs** of **revival**?

...are there signs of **radical discipleship** such that Pete Stedman has been challenging us with in the Lenten studies? //

Could it be that the church in Australia today has a **reputation** of being **alive**, but in reality, it is **dead**? //

Could it be that **clergy** over the last ½ century had a **reputation** for being alive... they took **services**, they **married** people - they **baptised**... they visited the **sick**... but - **inside**... in their **hearts** - where Jesus **sees all** and **knows all** - **DEAD!** //

What are the characteristics of a church which **looks** alive and is **dead**?

- **Empty ritual**
- **Weak, take it or leave it, preaching**
- An emphasis on **form** over **substance**
- **Social justice** issues taking precedence over **gospel proclamation**
- **Man** centred rather than **Christ**-centred
- **Hypocrisy** - **high level**...
- Church **rules** and **traditions** elevated in their importance - **policies, procedures, regulations, risk management**... taking **precedence**...
- **half hearted, unmotivated, unmoved, unloving members. No life. No growth.**
- **No one** being **transformed**.
- No one being led to give their lives to **Jesus**.
- **No** new disciples.
- **No** radical **discipleship**.

*You have a **reputation** of being alive, but you are **dead**.*//

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Friends, the sobering reality is, that I think this is an **accurate** picture of much of the **Western church today!!**

...but for one thing? – just **one problem...** !

I think the **reputation** of the church in the eyes of the average outsider/unbeliever is not **alive** but **dead...**! ///

...already **dead...**!! It's just that those on the **INSIDE** believe it's still **alive**!! ////

So perhaps for the church in the west – in many parts – the **church in Australia** – this would read "you have a reputation of being **dead** and you **are dead!**"

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What about our church right **here**?

Could this be said of **us**?

*You have a **reputation** of being alive, but you are **dead**.*

Of **course...** we'd be mad – **blind** – **arrogant** not to ask the question of ourselves...

"That **Anglican church of Noosa** – **great church** – **good music** – lots **happening...** - **great minister!**"

In other words – some things that **look** good peering in from the **outside...**

...but we must be **open** to this being true of us mustn't we??

– because we could well ask – **where** are the **young families**?

Why is our **giving** struggling so far this year?

Where are the new **disciples??** – people being **converted**?

....*maybe* this **IS** true of us? ////

I'm not **sure** it is – but we have to ask the **question!** ///

Or maybe it's true of **YOU?** //

Maybe you **love** to give the impression that you're **alive** and **keen** and **growing** and you love the Word of God and spend **heaps** of time in prayer... you **manage** how other people see you... come across so **wise** sometimes....

But it may be that you're a **fake.** //

What happens at **home** between you and **God** - is – well – **nothing much at all!**

Maybe you've been **keeping up appearances** for a long time... in the end – it's **exhausting...** and I know because there are times in my life when **I've done just that!!!**

*You have a **reputation** for being **alive**, but **you are dead**?*

True of **YOU??** //

Amazing how **well** Jesus sees. How **well** he knows what the church could be like.

Amazing that by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century - in round figures – 60 years after Jesus was around – that the church could have the **reputation** of being **alive...** but in reality – be **dead**.

What **hope** is there? What hope for the church in the western world today?

What hope for **YOU** if this is true of you this morning?

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Well – we see it in the call to

**4. ACTION**

Here is what he says to dead churches – to dead people – v 2 - look with me – *wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. v3 Remember; therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent!*

**Wake up, strengthen, remember and repent...**

An economy of words, which indicate a comprehensive response.

**Wake up church!**

**Realise the reality of the situation!**

**Realise your reality!** You're **dead!**

That's the first response for any one in denial about the situation isn't it – the first step an alcoholic must make is to admit they're an alcoholic!

The first step a **dead church** – a dead **Christian** – must make is to **admit** it! **Face** it. **Name** it! **Wake up!!**

*Strengthen what remains and is about to die...*

Jesus perhaps generously assumes that there is still *some* life... a small **pulse**... some **flicker of life**... like a **pilot light** burning under a hot water system... there still remains an **element of understanding**... an **element** perhaps of **love** and **trust**...

...whatever is there – **strengthen** it!!

Build it **up** again... **feed** it, **nurture** it...

**Fuel** it...

**Clarify** it...

**Fan** it into **flame**...

Can I say that to anyone here this morning with a **reputation** of being alive but in reality you know you're **dead**...

... **remember** when you were **alive** for Jesus? – assuming there's still *something* there – **draw** from your memory banks... ask for my help by all means – but do all you can – relying on God of course – to come **back** to him – to **return** to him – to **love** him again – to **long** for him again – to **quench** your spiritual **thirst** with **him**!!

**Remember** – what you have **seen** and **heard**... **recall** all you once **knew** about the **Lord Jesus** and **loved** about the **Scriptures**... remember the **simple truth** that “God so loved the world...”... that God loved you **so** much that he would send his Son so that through his death and resurrection – you – and all who want to – might be **forgiven** and **restored**!!!

...and **obey** – **obey** the Gospel by trusting in Jesus as Saviour and serving him as Lord... “*trust and obey*” the old chorus went “*trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey*”.

And **repent**... walk **away** from whatever has sucked the Christian life from you – from whatever **sin** or **idol** you've taken up – from whatever **distraction** that has got in the way... **repent**... turn around back towards Jesus... and put things **right** with him... admit your **failure** – seek his **forgiveness**... ask him for true **repentance** which is a radical about-face... //

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And when you do those four? – **wake up**, **strengthen** what remains... **remember** all you've learnt and loved in the past – and **repented**...?

...guess what – you'll find yourself being **restored** back to life... you'll sense the peace and presence of God – you'll feel the reality of the Lord Jesus – in your life again...

...and you'll be much less concerned with **your** reputation than about **Jesus'** reputation...

You'll be **pre-occupied** with ensuring **Jesus'** comes across well – not that **you** come across well... and your **reputation** and your **reality** will be beautifully **paired**... //

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And for the church at large? – must do precisely the same – wake up, strengthen remember and repent!

We must pray brothers and sisters that the church at large would take these simple yet profound **steps**.... It will take courage – and it will take the work of God's Holy Spirit for that to happen! So we must call on God to have mercy on his dead church that the church might see the reality of the present... and boldly take these **steps**. ///

And should this **not** happen? There is a very clear warning here – did you notice that? – have a look with me half way through v3 – *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.*

Now – this could simply be a reference to the return of Jesus at the end of time which is also described in the Gospels as a thief coming without announcement... so this could be reference to the judgement at the end of time...

Or... it could be a warning that there will be some time **prior** to that, where the dead church will face some particular form of **judgement**... we're just not sure...

But either way – the warning is clear – wake up – and therefore strengthen, remember and repent – or if you don't wake up – then you will face God's **judgement**...! ///

Finally the

## **5. ENCOURAGEMENT**

Have a look with me at v5 – *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels...*

Dressed in white 'like them'?

He's referring to those in Sardis – v4 – a few people – who have not soiled their clothes... that is – a few are actually still alive... they've **not** been **distracted** or drawn **aside**... they've **not** become **lax** and **lazy**... they've walked with Jesus in **reality**.... And dressed in **white**.. because they will wear Jesus' robe of **righteousness**...

Do you remember 2 Cor 5:21? – *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God... he takes our sin, we take his righteousness...*

What a **promise**... what a **gift**!

If you overcome... overcome and recover from having had a reputation of being alive but in reality being dead... then – just like those who have remained on track... you will wear Jesus' own righteousness!!,

and his promise to you is that your name will **never** be blotted out from the **book of life**...

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...and just as he said in the **Gospels**... he will acknowledge **your** name before his **Father** and his **angels!!**

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Is the **western church** dead? //

In many parts - undeniably so!!

It needs to wake up, strengthen what life remains, remember the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and repent!!

Are **you** dead?

Only you can answer that. Your reputation among us here might be anything but!

...but **Jesus** knows...

And if you know and are willing to wake up; strengthen what remains, remember the gospel... and repent...

...then you will share Jesus' righteousness and your name will **never be deleted** from the book of life... how good is that...!!

I would love to speak to any **dead people** after the service **this morning!!**

*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen.*