



**Pastor Kyle Mercer**  
The Dead Church

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Series: What's Wrong With the Church?  
Revelation 3:1-6

**BIG IDEA – SOME CHURCHES ARE DEAD AND DON'T KNOW IT!**

We love our city. We want to reach and bless and serve our city. We don't have here just a church vision; we have a city vision. When we came here seven and a half years ago, we knew that if we were going to serve and to reach and to bless our city, we were going to have to partner with all expressions of the body of Christ to saturate our city with the gospel. So we're so excited about our local ministry partners. We're glad to help them go farther faster.

Let me say something I don't say enough, so I'm going to say it right now. If you're a part of Two Cities Church and give consistently and generously, let me just say "Thank you." Everything we do is because of you. I know it's baptism week, and I know a lot of you are new. If you're new, I want you to know this. This is obvious, but just think about this. If you're new, you're sitting in the seats of somebody else's sacrifice.

Somebody else paid for your parking spot that you pulled into today. Somebody else paid for the seat you're sitting in. You're literally sitting in the seat of someone else's sacrifice. Our church is built on normal, everyday, average families that put the church first in their finances. Here's what I want to do. If you've been coming around for a while, I want to invite you to invest in the kingdom of God through Two Cities Church.

Here's the truth, guys. We still believe the best and brightest days are ahead. Here's how it works in any world but also the church world. The leaders set the vision; you guys set the pace. There's a lot we want to do, and we'd like to do it sooner than

later. So, let's pray together, and then we're going to dive into a church you may have never heard of, the church at Sardis. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you for those who are consistently generous in our church. They help us fund and fuel our ministry partners, like Hold the Rope partners, our local partners, and allow us to do everything we're doing...kids' ministry, student ministry, college ministry, Community Groups, mission trips...everything we're doing, Lord.

Lord, I pray that the people who need to would take their next step and would feel that invitation to invest in the kingdom of God through Two Cities Church. We pray this in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, "Amen."

Guys, I know you watch Netflix. It's okay. One of the most popular shows ever on Netflix (and that's saying a lot) is *The Walking Dead*. *The Walking Dead* made it 11 seasons. And what is it? It's a show about zombies. You know what a zombie is. It's something that's dead that's acting like it's alive, and it's only doing harm.

Let me tell you this. This is interesting. Let me tell you every zombie show and every zombie movie. Let me summarize all of them. Here's the plot of every zombie show or movie: "Where are the zombies? Over there where we need to go." That's the whole show. If you don't know that, that's the whole show.

If you're new, you're like, "What are we doing? Why are we talking about zombies in church?" It's because Jesus today calls this church that we're going to look at a zombie church. If you'll type to or turn to Revelation, chapter 3, I'll meet you there in a few minutes. There are zombie churches. I want you to know this. Some of you don't know this. You don't, and you need to.

They are churches that are dead. That's what Jesus says. I'll show you this in a minute. They're dead. They may have a budget. They may have a website. They may have a staff. They may have a Sunday service, but they are dead. Here's the interesting thing. This is true about zombies. You don't know a zombie is dead from a distance. You have to get up close and go, "Oh, that's dead. Yep." So it is with churches.

Just like zombies, these churches do more harm than good. Dare I say, I think this is the most common church in our city. I think it's the most common church in our nation. Churches die. We believe here in church birth, and we believe in church death. The sad state in America... This was pre-COVID. I couldn't find after COVID. You know what COVID did. If churches were on life support, they died during COVID. Before COVID, 85 percent of churches had plateaued, were dying, or were dead.

The *Economist* wrote this article about how in England (this was a couple of years ago) very wealthy men and women were buying old church buildings and turning them into homes. They had done this to 500 different churches. Well, that makes a lot of sense. Why? Because where are churches located? In the best locations if they're old, and a small church is a very big house. This is what's happening, guys.

Why am I talking about this today? Well, first, it arises out of Scripture, but secondly, we don't want our church to die. Now, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will never die, but almost every local church dies. I'll tell you how in a little bit. By the way, there's nothing more powerful than a church that is fully functioning and is alive.

Literally, I'm at the Wake/NC State game yesterday, and I'm looking around. I'm like, "This is the most exciting thing that's going on in this city...except for what happens in an alive local church." Life happens in alive churches. People's lives are changed. People's eternities are changed. People's destinies are changed. Marriages are healed. Families are reconciled. Addictions are broken.

So, we want the church to flourish. I was just talking to a guy a couple of weeks ago. He's in his 40s. He said, "Kyle, I came to Christ in this church, and I'm growing like crazy in this church. Now you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to raise my kids in this church." It's like, "May your tribe increase."

Here's another reason we're talking about this, guys. Many of you have family in dead churches. You do. It's heartbreaking. I've talked to some of you. It's like, "Oh, yeah. My sister lives in Virginia." "Does she go to church?" "Yes, but it's dead." This may be surprising to some of you. It would be better that she didn't go to church, because all the dead church does is confirm her in her ungodliness and her worldliness.

So, let's now look at what Jesus says. I know you're new. You're like, "This is intense." We'll see what this says. Come with me. Look here. Revelation 3:1: ***"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.'"*** We're getting Jesus' perspective on the church. Here it is. ***"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."*** This is the zombie church.

Here's what we're going to do today for the rest of our time. Grab your scalpel, because we're doing an autopsy. Every once in a while, somebody dies in a mysterious way. This happened this year in our church. Someone dies, and you say, "What happened?" Then you say, "All right. We're going to pay a little extra money. We're going to figure this out." The autopsy is for the living. We're going to look at this together, guys.

## 00 BACKGROUND: THE CITY OF SARDIS

Let me tell you about Sardis. Sardis is an interesting city. It was a wealthy city, so it was a wealthy church. There's nothing wrong with wealthy churches except this. Why are dead churches still open? There's only one reason. They still have money. That's the only reason they haven't felt the full pain and result and consequences of their foolishness and rebellion.

I'll tell you how the dead church works. You look at it and go, "How's it still functioning?" It's like, "Oh, I know how. Betsy gave something to it in her estate." It's like, "Oh, no." That's the worst thing that could happen. She's naïve or innocent, and she's old, and somehow someone talks her into giving her estate to this dead church...ugh...to confirm it in its worldliness for a couple more decades. Churches that are dead are still open because they have money.

Secondly, it was a place of garments. They had their own Hanes factory, you could say, which is going to be interesting, because at the end Jesus is going to say, "You're going to need a garment. I'll give it to you." But most interestingly, they had a necropolis. You go, "What is that?" That's a big word. *Necropolis* is a fancy word for a graveyard or a cemetery.

So, they had this awesome graveyard. It was so awesome because kings had been buried there and queens had been buried there and famous people had been buried there and rich people had been buried there. So people would come from all over. They'd say, "Let's go see this person's graveyard." I love this, because Jesus says, "Your city has a cemetery, but your church *is* a cemetery."

## 01 JESUS AND THE SPIRIT ARE ABOUT LIFE

So, Jesus writes to this church, and he says this. Look here. I want you to read this again. We'll look at this together. ***"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.'"*** First of all, notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't commend this church. This is one of only two churches (in two more weeks, we'll get to the church at Laodicea)...

There are only two of the seven churches Jesus has nothing good to say about. You have to understand this. There are some churches that there is nothing good to say about them. Nothing. What's interesting is this church doesn't have any persecution.

There's no persecution mentioned, one of the only churches. Oh, that's interesting. Yes, because the world does not persecute dead churches.

In fact, worldly people love dead churches. They look at them and go, "Oh, everyone dresses so nicely when they go to that church. It's kind of like they're reenacting some religious experience. It's really good for them." Worldly people look at dead churches and go, "What a great place. It's like a little Rotary Club. What a great place to have relationship but no repentance, good works but no God's Word, good deeds but no good news."

There's no mention of Satan, because Satan isn't concerned with dead churches. We've talked about Satan a lot the last few weeks. Well, he doesn't get concerned with a dead church, because if Satan showed up and went "Boo!" they'd know he's real. It might wake them up spiritually. The problem with this church is this church.

So, Jesus writes to them. Do you see what he says? He says, "I'm the one who has the seven spirits." Let me translate it. So, they get the letter. We try to do this every week. "Guys, Jesus wrote us a letter." Could you imagine if I said that this week? "Hey, guys. Jesus wrote Two Cities..." "What does it say?"

So, the church at Sardis. "Jesus wrote us a letter. Okay. Hold on, guys. Here's what it says. It says Jesus is alive. Great! It says we're dead." That's Jesus' message to this church: "I'm alive, but you're dead." The church is supposed to be a place where life happens. The saddest thing about this is that the people in this church don't know the church is dead.

Have you ever gone into places and just knew they were dying? Forget churches. I can remember walking into a Kmart a couple of years ago, pulling one of the people aside, and going, "Find another job." I mean, is it not immediately obvious? We go into places all the time and are like, "It's dying." We have friends and family, and they think that's normal Christianity.

Here's what happens when a church dies. Let me give you multiple definitions today. The Holy Spirit leaves the church. That's why Jesus introduces himself as the one who has the seven spirits. *Seven* is the number of perfection and completion. What happens when a person dies? The spirit leaves the body. What happens when a church dies? The Spirit leaves the building.

Now, what is the sign of an alive church? Well, there are many, but I'll give you really practical ones. As soon as I say this, you're going to go, "Well, that makes sense. Obviously." A church that's alive has two things: babies and baptisms. That's fairly

simple. Yeah. People are being born. "Oh, there's new life happening in this church." And people are being born again. "Oh, there's spiritual life happening in this church."

Believe me. I don't know a lot of things, but I know the church world, and there are churches all the time that are dead and are trying to figure out why those two things aren't happening. It's like, "Why are no young people coming to our church? Why are there no marriages in our church? Why is no one having babies in our church? Why aren't we baptizing anyone?" Those are at least some of the visible signs of life in a church.

## **02 CONFRONT: YOU ARE DEAD AND DON'T KNOW IT**

So, Jesus says, "I'm alive; you're dead." I want to talk about how churches die. We believe in church birth, and we believe in church death. Again, not *the* church of Jesus Christ, but local churches. They die. We know our birth date as a church: 9/18/2016. That's when we were born as a church. We do not know the date of our death. We hope we don't die, but almost every church across human history has died, and you'll see why.

Here's what happens. As soon as I say this, you're going to start thinking of churches. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* You're going to start thinking of them, because it's exactly what happens. It starts with a man or men or men and women. You have this group. For us it was 30 of us. We were in Raleigh-Durham, and we were like, "Let's do this!" It was like, "Maybe God will do something. Let's pray. Let's sacrifice. Let's give." That's how all churches start.

It kills me. I know I'm weird, but I'll be driving around the city, and I'll see some church that's dead. (I'm trying not to preach this sermon angry.) I will literally look at the building and think, "Somebody paid for that!" As a leader, I'm like, "That means some pastor got up and cast a vision, and there was a group of people that sacrificed. They architected that building for purposes, and it's dead."

This is what happens. Basically, you have men and women. They start doing ministry, and God breathes and blesses it. Then there's a move of God, however big, small, or medium. Those are the three good signs of how church life works. A couple men and women say, "Maybe God will use us." They start doing ministry, God blesses it, and it turns into a little movement.

Then what happens is it becomes a machine. This happens subtly. It goes into neutral. It goes onto cruise control. It goes onto autopilot. We forget why we do

things and the reasons, and everything gets harder. Here's the transition. You've been in this church or you know about this church. It's the church that goes from machine to monument. *Monument* is when we look to the past and talk about one person. "Well, when Dr. [So-and-so] was here...that's really when things happened."

Then, once you're tired of talking about the guy who has the oil painting in the basement, it becomes a museum. It becomes where you talk about all of the things God used to do in the past, and eventually it becomes where we are today: a morgue. That's how churches die. What is the definition of a church dying? The Spirit leaving. Why do churches die? Because people in them are spiritually dead.

As we've tried to work with dead and dying churches... It's very, very hard. I don't even want to tell you the stories. They're all discouraging so far. One of the reasons is dead and dying churches don't know they're dead and dying. They're in denial. It's exactly what Jesus is saying here.

The other problem with dead and dying churches is they think they're way better than they are, especially when they're looking for a new pastor. Have you seen this church? "Oh, we've got four acres. Look at our building. We've been around since 1948." Then they love to say, "And we've had seven pastors in the last 10 years."

You're like, "Is that a confession?" If you want to find a church that's dying, look for high pastor turnover. Churches chew up and spit out pastors. There are many churches that we would never consider under any circumstances ever sending a person to, because they are so dead.

### **03 THREE TYPES OF DEAD OR DYING CHURCHES**

I want to tell you the three most common types of dead churches. I'm going to summarize all the teaching I know in Scripture and in history on the three most common... If a church died, normally one of three things happened. I'll just give them to you. Here they are. You know, we do the autopsy. "Oh, this is what it was."

First (I won't spend a lot of time on this, because we've talked about this a lot in the past), they leave God's Word. I mean, not usually...sometimes...in brash, blunt ways, but normally what happens... Maybe you'd say it this way. When the church closes God's Word, Jesus closes that church.

Here's how it normally happens. A lot of these churches started out solid. Maybe they had the view of Scripture we do...the total truthfulness, the total trustfulness of

Scripture. But normally what happens... Another reason churches die is because of the pastors. Here's a principle from Scripture: People get the leaders they deserve. People get the leaders they put up with.

A lot of times, a pastor comes in, and then he says something like this: "Hey, guys. I don't know that we can trust Scripture. I mean, some of it's inspired, but some of it's not." Now, as soon as I tell you, "Some of Scripture is inspired and some is not," what's the first thing you think? "What's not inspired?" And guess what you'll think next. "The part I don't want to obey." That's exactly what you'll think next. "That's the part that's not inspired."

Then here's the other subtle thing. I'm just telling you this is what happens. This is how churches go theologically liberal, and let me just tell you this. Please hear this. There is not one theologically liberal church in the entire world growing. They're going the way of the dodo.

Anyway, here's what happens. If I say, "Guys, guys, guys! You cannot trust all of Scripture..." The next thing the pastor says is, "But I've gone to seminary, and I will tell you what you can trust and what you cannot trust." Oh! Do you see what they're doing? "You can trust me." So then the pastor becomes the authority and not the Scripture.

We don't get to change or choose our message. Our message is not how to have a nice family. That may be an implication of following Christ for you; it may not. Our message is not how to get your finances together in three or four steps. That may be an implication of following Christ, and some principles from Proverbs...whatever. Our message is how to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, here's what we've done. Every once in a while, I just want to tell you why we do something. Why do I get up here...? Because this is strange to some of you. I get up and just go through books of the Bible. I remember we had this guy. He ended up coming to Christ in our church. He was a medical student, maybe a resident. This was a couple of years ago.

He came to our church. He came to me afterward. He had been at some dead church in a different state. He had moved here for medical school. He came up and went, "This is really interesting what you guys do. It's like some big Bible study." I'm like, "I guess. Basically, yes." We just walk through books of the Bible line by line.

The reason we do that is to protect the integrity of the church, because the other temptation is for pastors to get up here and share their hobbyhorses. They can be really good hobbyhorses. "Guys, we're talking about prayer again." You're like,



"Again?" It could be evangelism. It could be finances and generosity. The nice thing about this is... You know, I didn't plan on this. This is kind of strange. I'm talking about dead churches on a week that we have a bunch of guests. Okay.

I've been planning on preaching on this this weekend for, like, a year. I didn't know we'd put baptisms on here. Anyway, expositional preaching (by the way, *expositional* just means to expose...you can see that...to expose what the text says) is a safeguard...not a guarantee, but a safeguard...against a church dying and declining and leaving God's Word.

Okay. That's the first thing. The first reason churches die (you know this) is they leave God's Word. Sometimes they go completely theologically liberal and off the rails. Other times they just question it a lot, and they don't speak of its authority and its total truthfulness.

Secondly, churches die because they cling to tradition. Let me tell you the famous last words of a human. "Hold my beer. This will just take a second." Let me tell you the famous last words of a church. "This is how we've always done it." I want to talk to you for a minute about the difference between *tradition* and *traditionalism*. If you want to ruin something, you just put an *ism* on the end of it.

The Latin word for *tradition* means to derive or translate. Rightly understood, tradition is how you transfer truth to another generation. Tradition basically says (you *should* think this way), "Our ancestors weren't stupid. They were probably smarter than us in some ways, thought about this longer than us, made a lot of failures, paid a lot of dumb tax. They probably knew what they were doing. We should probably assume we should do what they did."

That's what tradition says. Fair enough, because tradition is how you transfer truth. Every church has traditions, every business has traditions, and every family has traditions. Great. What is traditionalism? Traditionalism says, "There's only one way to do that. There's only one way to sing songs in church. There's only one way to dress at church." Oh! That's not tradition, how y'all have done it and had your reasons why; it's traditionalism.

You can always see the goofiness (I love to use the word *goofy*, if you haven't noticed, because I think a lot of things are just goofy and we need to call them out) of traditionalism when you look at history. Let me give you a couple of examples. Pews, for example. You know you're in a traditional church if you mention, "Well, what if we got chairs...?" "What?!" That's the sign. "I'm in a traditional church."

For hundreds of years, churches didn't have pews. This is why being historically rooted is helpful. People stood, because that was respecting God's Word. So, when people said, "Let's bring in the pews," everyone said, "No! That's ungodly." Then the people who got the pews think *that's* ungodly when we're going to chairs.

How about stained glass windows? Why do we have stained glass windows? Because people were illiterate, obviously. They were pictures. They existed to help people learn the story of the gospel. What is the stained glass window in churches today? Screens. But the very people who love stained glass often hate screens. Oh, because they don't understand they both were serving the same purpose.

How about the organ? Do you know where they got the organ from? They took it out of the bar. It's the same people who love the organ who hate the drums. I'm like, "Listen. The organ is the loudest instrument on earth. There is nothing louder than the organ." Goofy. These people... Traditionalism.

Why did ministers wear black? Some still do. The minister wore black to communicate, "I'm a sinner." That was the whole purpose. It was like, "Hey, guys, look. Just so you know, I want you to know..." This was after the Protestant Reformation when there was a big difference between the minister and the members. They wore black to go, "Guys, black means sinner, just like you."

What happens today when you see someone...? You know, you go into one of those churches. You're like, "Why is the guy wearing a dress? No one dresses like that anymore. Does he think he's better than us?" No. We've just forgotten the reason why. That's why in most churches today the pastor dresses like the people. It's to communicate "There's no difference."

Have you ever heard the story of the lady...? I've told this before, but it's worth telling it again, because many of you are new. The lady who's newly married, and she's trying to impress her husband, so she starts cooking Christmas dinner. She cuts both sides off the ham before she puts the ham in the pan.

The husband says, "Wait a second. My mother didn't do that. Why are you cutting off both sides of the ham before you put it in the pan?" She says, "It's what my mom did." He says, "I'm getting to the bottom of this. I'm calling your mother." So he calls her. "Hey, what is going on here? I've never seen... It looks goofy...cut this side off, cut that side off." She says, "Well, I'll be honest with you. I just did it because my mom did it." He says, "Well, I'm calling Grandma."

So he calls Grandma and says, "Grandma, why did you cut the left side of the ham and the right side of the ham off before you put it in the pan?" She says, "Because it

wouldn't fit in the pan if I didn't." That is many churches dead and stuck in traditionalism. There was a reason we cut off the ham, and we forgot it. We became obsessed with the practice, and we forgot the principle.

So, this is how churches die. They cling to tradition. Think about it this way. Anything that is alive is going to grow and change. Things that are dead stay the same. Things that are alive grow and change. So, why do we practice expositional preaching? Because we don't want to leave God's Word.

How do we fight against traditionalism? We always tell you why we're doing what we're doing. I know some of you today are like, "Why is Spencer up...? Can't he just do baptisms? Why does he have to give that little speech before baptisms?" Oh, that's because he wants us to know why.

Some of you are like, "If Donovan would just sing... Why does he have to stop and talk to us every once in a while?" Because he's reminding you why we're doing what we're doing. When we do the Lord's Supper... We're always leading with why we're doing what we're doing, and we're always about the principle, not about the practice, trying to get at the heart of it.

Finally, the third most common type of dead church is a church that becomes inward focused. In all of my studies this week, this was the one that they said is the sure killer. This is it. The church turns inward. The most obvious place to see this, which not everyone has access to, is the budget, they say. I saw one study. Fourteen churches died. I mean, they were dead.

Afterward, this consultant came in and met with all of these different churches, and he wanted to see their budget. In all 14 of the churches... Over the years (this always happens, not overnight but over time), all of the ministries and all of the mission and all of the mercy outside the church stopped happening, stopped making the budget line, and everything became more and more about the dwindling few people in the church and how to continue to do all of the things they loved to do.

The church needs to realize (hear this carefully) the church, in part, exists for those who are not yet a part of it. I mean, we get it. I primarily am preaching to Christians who call Two Cities Church home, but I'm always aware there are other people here. I understand that the primary purpose of the church is to edify the church so they can be equipped for good works, but I also understand that the church exists for those who are not yet a part of it. Otherwise, God would have just taken us to heaven.

So, they become... You know this church. It becomes apathetic. It becomes indifferent. They stop caring. They stop trying. Here's another one: they become

unbelievably obsessed with their building. Now, some of you are like, "Kyle, you talk about our building a lot." Look. I have carefully crafted the language I have used with our building. It's a home and hub for ministry and mission. It's a means to a greater end. It's a facility to facilitate ministry.

I have a friend. He pastors in New York City. If you're a pastor in New York City, you don't have a building. I mean, you can rent or lease, but the chance that you're going to get a building is not good. So he told me... He's so intense. He was talking to a group of us, actually. He said, "Kyle, what I do is I walk the streets of New York City, because there are all of these dead and dying churches with massive buildings in Manhattan."

He said, "And I pray..." I can't remember if it was Matthew 24, but he goes, "I pray Matthew 24 over the churches. Lord, take the kingdom from those who bear no fruit and give it to those who will bear fruit." I was like, "You are intense!" But that's exactly the problem. If I could become the evangelical pope of Protestantism, I would fix the real estate problem immediately.

It's like, "Oh, look! There's a church. It's sitting on \$25 million worth of property and buildings. There are four churches in the city that are dying for some space, and they're growing, but this arrogant, self-centered church would rather sell it to some Russian tycoon and build condos." I'm sick of that stuff. People are obsessed with their building. Here's the symptom: they're obsessed with the past.

A couple of years ago... He has now died and gone with the Lord. I knew this guy in his 80s. Imagine this. He used to ride his bike to our church...in his 80s. Vibrant, discipling guys, caring for the next generation, financially generous. It's hard to live a better life than this guy lived. So, I met this guy after service one time, and I basically said, "I want to be like you when I'm old." I said, "What's the key to being young and vibrant and passionate when you're old?"

He said, "Well, the problem with old people is the older they get the more they talk about the past and the less they talk about the future." The same thing happens with churches. Then he said, "The way I have dealt with this is I have made sure my dreams are always bigger than my memories." I thought, "That's a word." That's a word for some churches. That's a word for some Christians.

How do we fight against leaving God's Word? We focus on expositional preaching. How do we focus on not clinging to traditionalism? We always focus on why we're doing something, the principle not the practice. How do we not become inward focused? Our dreams must be bigger than our memories. We must care about those outside the church, not just those inside the church.

## 04 THE CALL TO WAKE UP AND STRENGTHEN

I want to show you Jesus' recipe for revival and renewal. It shows up in verse 2. *"Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God."* There's the formula. We'll unpack it...the recipe for revival.

The first thing he says (some of you really do need to hear this today) is "Wake up!" Some people are easier to wake up than others. Right? They normally marry each other. There are certain people... You're tiptoeing out of the room, and it's like, "Hello, Jim!" You know, everyone is up. For some people, it's just a little bit of light and a little bit of noise and they're up.

There are some people who come in and hear the gospel and are reminded of some things, and all of a sudden they go to some college ministry, or whatever, and they wake up. There are other people... Some of you, genuinely, have been asleep spiritually for a long time. I don't want to get weird about this, but we talk about you. We know who you are. We really do.

We're all confused. We talk to your wife about you. We talk to your husband about you. We talk to your kids, and we're all confused. It's like, "Yeah, Dad comes every week. He feels nothing. He's bored. Pray for Dad." People go, "How can people sing those songs and stay asleep?" We don't know, but it happens.

So, "Wake up" basically means "Face reality." That's what many of you need to do. We'll even use that term sometimes. We'll say to somebody, "Dude, you're completely addicted. Wake up! Do you see what you're doing to your health? Let's just talk about your health. Wake up to your health, man. This is killing you."

You'll say this to people. You see some guy, and he's talking to some girl at work, and he's a little too excited to spend time with her. You're like, "Wake up! You're married." Some guy is traveling all the time...all of his goofy hobbies. It's like, "Wake up! You have kids." It's very hard to wake up, because people like to be blind.

It's one of the reasons people drink so much. It's like, "I'd like to be partially conscious. I don't want to really know all that's going on in my life." It's why people stay away from church. I mean, this is supposed to be an alarm clock. We had a guy bring a friend one time. I said, "What did your friend think?" He said, "He's never coming back. It's too real." Think about *that*.

"Wake up," he says. Here's the interesting thing. So, he says, "Wake up." Then he says, "Strengthen what remains." This is Jesus saying, "Start where you are and start with what you have." You know. Particularly men... The problem men have is they're embarrassed of where they are. Women are too, but men really are.

It's like, "All right, man. You never, ever pray with your family, and you should have." But even to start is to admit you haven't. Who knows what kind of wife you have and if she's going to say something, and if your kids... Now what do you do? It's all so embarrassing. That's the humility of the Christian faith. It's like, "Well, this is where I am. I start where I am."

Think about this. Here's one thing you're all doing. I don't know why, but you're all here today. Jesus is saying, "The things you're doing... Could you do them a little better? Could you do them with more heart, with more emotion?" I mean, you're already here. You've already given us 75 to 80 minutes of your time. What if you just decided, "I already come to church once or twice a month. Maybe when I'm there I'll pay attention next time. Maybe I'll learn some of these songs."

Guys, I've read the whole Bible. Nowhere does it say, "When worshiping, stand there and look bored," but that's what some of you do. So, maybe you could say, "Maybe I could sing some more." Maybe you'd say, "You know what? This is humiliating, but I have one Christian friend." Well, strengthen what remains. Maybe you could tell her a secret that you need to tell somebody, because that's what a friend does.

By definition, a friend is the one you share secrets with. "I've always struggled with this, and I've never told..." Whenever someone tells me, "I've never told anyone this," I go, "I'm excited. Go tell someone else." No, I'm just kidding. But I do get excited, because it's like, "There's going to be freedom here." So, wherever you are, that's where you start.

Now, here's what you think. You always think in three categories: *frequency*, *duration*, and *intensity*. "Whatever I'm doing, could I do it more?" You might be like, "You know what? I read my Bible once a month." I know this sounds silly, but could you do twice a month?

"I do my devotion, but I just do it to check it off my list. It takes me five minutes." Well, could you do it for 10 and slow down? There's duration. There's frequency, how often. There's intensity. That's "I'm going to bring my heart. I'm going to bring my emotions to this. I'm going to slow down. I'm going to have a posture toward this."

Well, he says, "Wake up." He says, "Strengthen what remains." Now, I just applied that to us individually, as Christians, but I want to tell you something we're going to

be doing in the future, because if you look around here... And we're only nine weeks into this. What are we going to do when this room is full (which it almost is, and it was last service)? What are we going to do? Are we just going to turn people away?

One of the things we're going to do is we're going to help bring life to other churches in our city if they'll let us, which you can start praying for. We're not saying that we hung the moon. There would be nothing that would make me more excited than to help... Here's what it's called, if you want the technical church term. It's called to *revitalize a church*.

It's very hard, though, because the church has to admit it needs help. Do you want to know the average size a church needs to get to where it goes, "Help"? This is a fact. How small does a church need to get to where they go, "Please help us"? Seventeen people. By the time you get the phone call, you're like, "It's a little late. We'll try to strengthen what remains. We'll try."

Nothing would make me more excited. I don't know that this is going to happen, but this would make me excited, genuinely: if once or twice a year we were... I'm not even going to name the name of a church. "Hey, this church in Lewisville... You know what, guys? They want us to help. The 50 of you who are leaving, get onstage right now." And we just send people out all the time.

We want to be that crazy church that says, "Please don't come back next week. Go somewhere else and help them." That's what we want to do. So, this is... It's in the text. What are we going to do? By the grace of God, if other churches will let us, we are going to help strengthen them. I'm telling you, guys. If you've ever been in a dead and dying church, nothing will wear you out like that.

Honestly, a lot of these pastors are great. I'm not picking on them. Some pastors are the problems too. A lot of these pastors are trying, and it's like, "This church just needs to vote to never vote again." I'm dead serious. "It needs completely new leadership, and it needs to humble itself. If it does, its brightest and best days can be ahead of it."

He says, "I need you to wake up. I need you to strengthen what remains." Look at verse 3. ***"Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."***

So, he says, "Remember." I won't talk about this long, because I talked about it before. He says a similar thing to the church at Ephesus, which we covered in the first week of the seven churches. There are things in the Christian life you need to

forget. Paul says, "Forgetting what lies behind." But there are also things in the Christian life you need to remember. I've told you this before, but a lot of teaching is learning new things, and a lot of teaching is reminding people of old things.

What is the purpose of memory? I don't know if you've ever asked that question. It's interesting. A lot of people talk about, "Let's go on this vacation, and let's go backpack through Europe, because afterward we'll have the memories." Like has happened to a lot of things in America today, everything has become therapeutic. "My memories are about me thinking back on things and feeling fuzzy feelings when I do." Well, a small part of your memory is that.

According to the Bible, your memory exists so you can look to the past and know what not to do and what to do. That's the purpose of memory. You're like, "Last time I did that I felt guilty, I felt convicted, I felt foolish, I hid it, I felt insecure, and I was ashamed. I shouldn't do that again." That's the purpose of memory.

The other purpose of memory is, "Man! When I was walking with God and praying and confessing my sins and living in community, I was full of joy." Remembering is basically, "Let me reenter the past to learn its lessons so I can live differently in the future."

He says, "...what you received and heard." Christianity is taught and caught. There are certain things you're taught. There are other things that are caught. By the way, one of the things people who need to wake up... What they need is other strong Christians in their life to look to and model it.

## **05 HOPE: JESUS CAN DO A LOT WITH A LITTLE (REMNANT)**

I'll show you this. Look at verse 4. He says, "***Yet you have still...***" This is interesting. If there's any good thing Jesus says about this church, it's in verse 4. "***Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.***"

Every dead church has alive Christians in it, and every living church has dead church people in it. This happened during COVID. Churches that were on life support before COVID died. COVID was an amplifier, a magnifier, an accelerator of reality. It's like, "Sorry. This is where your family was. Sorry. This is where your church was. Sorry. This is where your business was." COVID just amplified it.



So, what happened during COVID is a lot of churches were dying and died. During this time, a lot of people (this is a true story) came over from dead and dying churches, so I've talked to many, many of you. One of the interesting things when you talk to people who come over from dead and dying churches is they have wrestled for a long time whether or not they should leave or stay.

I can't even tell you all of the stories. It wouldn't be appropriate. You just talk to people. It's like, "Dude, I raised my kids in this church. I baptized my son in this church. I was a deacon in that church." Or they point back to some glory days. "I remember when the youth group was thriving."

What happens is... This just happens. Every person needs to finally decide, "Am I going to be able to actually make a spiritual difference in this church or is this church actually so unhealthy I can't even remain in it; it's not good for me?" A lot of times, people leave because their kids are invested too. They're like, "I can do it. I can put up with it. I can hope for the best, but my kids cannot sit in another service like that. They're going to wither, die, and hate Christianity. We can't do it."

So, this is a situation in which he's saying there are a few people in this dead church who are being faithful. Then he ends with this. This is where we'll end. Verses 5-6: ***"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments..."*** He's speaking to a city that makes garments. ***"...and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."***

At the very end, Jesus talks about the Book of Life. Interesting. Here are the themes: death and life. I don't know if you remember this moment. I think it's in Luke, chapter 10. The disciples come back, and they had this great ministry experience. They're having powerful, living ministry.

They come back and tell Jesus, "Hey, even the demons submit to us," and Jesus says, "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you." He says, "Rejoice that your name is written in heaven." In other words, in the Book of Life. What's going to motivate us to continue to be living and alive is going to be the gospel of Jesus Christ, what he has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection.

There are three types of people in this room, and really only three types of people. Some of you are spiritually dead. It's a weird thing to say, because the Bible says you can have biological life... You can be physically alive and spiritually dead. What we've been praying for... We have a prayer team that prays for you guys every service. We've been praying for the people here today, especially visitors on a baptism Sunday, who are spiritually dead.

Here's the first thing we're hoping you realize: that you're spiritually dead. The weird thing about that is the moment you realize you're spiritually dead you begin your pathway to spiritual life. I am trying, by the grace of God, by the power of the Spirit, metaphorically, to shock you guys. *Shock* you. It's like, "Is there a pulse?" We're looking for anything. "Are there any vital signs of spiritual life in this person's heart?"

The second type of person in here is the dry person. It's understandable. Life is hard. We become familiar with the things of God, and a lot of us end up... Most of us, maybe all of us, will have seasons of our lives that are spiritually dry. I heard Paul Tripp... You guys know. He's a famous Christian author and everything. I heard him tell a story one time.

He was reading his Bible. He said, "As I was reading my Bible... I'd done this for a couple of days in a row, then did it for a week or two in a row, and nothing was happening in my heart." He said, "So one day, after I was tired of that, I just walked into our bedroom. My wife was getting ready, and I said to her, 'I have been reading this Bible for the last three weeks, and I feel nothing. Would you pray for me?'"

Sometimes that's what you have to do. You have to go, "I'm very dry right now, and I feel nothing, so I need to get around the things God uses...his Word, his Spirit, his people." That leads to the third thing. Some of you are dead, some of you are dry, and others of you...this is encouraging...are dynamic spiritually. We need, continually, to have men and women and young boys and girls in this church who are pacesetters and thermostats for Christ.

John Wesley said if a man is on fire for God, people will come from all over to watch him burn. We need people in this church who are alarm clocks, because what a dynamic, vibrant Christian does is wake up all of the sleepy Christians around them. Guys, what we're going to end praying for is two things: *renewal* and *revival*. Let me just give you the difference. You may have heard those words before. What's the difference between *renewal* and *revival*?

*Renewal* happens in one person's life. Renewal can happen right now. It could happen in one person's life in this service. Like, "Oh man! I feel set free. I feel like I want to walk with Christ. I feel conviction. I feel hope." Renewal is basically when the doctrines of sin and grace become real and personal to you at a new level. So, the hope would be constant renewal. That would be your hope. "Hey, Lord, I would love daily renewal if I could get it."

What's the difference between *renewal* and *revival*? *Revival* is corporate. *Renewal* happens with one person. I heard a pastor say one time, "Go ahead and draw a circle around yourself. Stand there until you have renewal." You don't need anyone else.

*Revival* happens when a bunch of people experience renewal at the same time. I've seen it happen in families. It's like a little revival in that house. God is working. Or in some Community Group or in some church. So, as we close, let's pray for personal renewal and corporate revival.

Lord, we just pray. You gave us the recipe for revival. It's "Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Start where you are. Start with what you have. Remember. Repent." Lord, I pray for personal renewal all over this room. People need to be renewed. They need to dream again about their life with Christ. They need to take off the old and put on the new. Lord, would you bring renewal?

Maybe some of you need to come up and pray with our prayer teams on the sides here during this last song. Just pray for renewal in your heart. Pray for revival in your home.

Lord, would you bring revival? We'd love to see revival in our church. We'd love to see revival on the college campuses in our city. We'd love to see revival in the high schools in our city, Lord. Would you bring renewal and revival for your glory and our good? In Jesus' name, amen.