

# True Life: Sardis

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 03 November 2002

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Felix Orji

[ 0 : 00 ] I would encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Revelation, chapter 3, and we'll look at verses 1 to 6. You find out on page 229 in the New Testament section of your pure Bibles.

If you have been in Vancouver for quite some time, you would have heard that St. John's Shonoffee is a very lively evangelical Anglican church in Canada.

You probably have heard that this church is one of the largest Anglican churches in Canada. And of course, if you're visiting here, people encourage you to come to St. John's because you discover and you find and experience the best that you can ever find in Anglicanism in North America.

And that, I think, is the opinion of many of us here, and that's wonderful. So, but here is the question. Is that view, is that opinion in agreement with what Jesus actually thinks about St. John's? Is that the way that Jesus views St. John's? Does Jesus share the same view that we have about St. John's and other people have about St. John's?

[ 1 : 40 ] Does Jesus share the opinion that you have about yourself? Are they necessarily the same? I think it is a very important question.

Because what we think about ourselves as individuals and what we think about our church, and what other people think about St. John's, is not necessarily what the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Savior and the Head of the Church, thinks of us.

It may be the same, but it is not necessarily the same. I think that the sign of spiritual maturity is to understand and accept that there is a great difference between what human beings see and what God himself sees.

As God spoke to Samuel the prophet in the Old Testament, the Lord said to him, The Lord God does not look at the things that man looks at.

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. The Lord is not deceived by how we look and what we think about ourselves.

[ 3 : 00 ] He knows our thoughts. He knows our motives. And there is absolutely nothing that can be hidden from him. John Stott put it this way, The Lord can see how much reality there is behind our profession.

And he also can see how much life there is behind the facade of religious spirituality. But I think that the most important thing in the spiritual life is to pay attention, to pay serious attention, to what the Lord thinks about us and about his church, and not to what we think, and what others think about ourselves.

For the simple reason that our view of ourselves and other people's view of us could be dangerously misleading, and eventually eternally very costly.

People can end up in hell because they are not listening to God, but they are listening to their own press, and what other people think of them.

It is a very dangerous mistake. And we see this clearly in the church of Sardis. Here was a church that had the name for being spiritually alive.

[ 4 : 30 ] In the city and the province of Asia Minor, this particular church in Sardis had a reputation of being the example of light and life and spiritual vitality.

And of course one would begin to wonder, was this self-delusion? Were they intentionally deceiving themselves? I don't think so. One of the ways to get this kind of reputation is to look at the outward appearance and the things that are happening within the congregation.

People have visited and have seen a flurry of activity and probably wonderful programs. There must have been good music and a variety of activities and a clear sensitivity to the culture of their time.

And so as far as they were concerned, their church was alive. It was a progressive Christian church right on the cutting edge of its society and culture.

They were indeed living for God and God was active in their midst. And of course, this is the problem with the way human beings see as a problem with outward appearances which can always be very deceiving and deceptive.

[ 6 : 01 ] What the people saw was not what God saw. When Jesus looked at this particular church, he was not impressed for one single moment.

He did not see their life. He did not see the vitality. What he saw as the all-knowing God was a life that was full of deadness and apathy and complacency.

Here was a church that had the appearance of spiritual life. But in reality, on the basis of God's standard, this church was as dead as deadness can be.

John Stott put it that way, this way, that this socially respectable church was actually a spiritual graveyard. Outwardly, they seemed fine, but inwardly, they were impure and sinful.

And of course, in the Bible, spiritual death is always caused by sin and by a refusal to be connected to the person of Jesus Christ and to the power of the Holy Spirit.

[ 7 : 18 ] When sin becomes normative in the Christian life, when we refuse to be connected day by day to the person of Jesus, and when we ignore the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the church, the result is spiritual deadness, even though there is a flurry of activity and self-righteousness.

Sin in the life of an individual within the body of Christ can cause spiritual death in the body of Christ. The church is not made up of pews and pulpits and organs.

It's made up of people. And the dead church is a group of dead people. And it's very, very dangerous. Jesus looked at their deeds, not at their outward appearance.

And he said to them, I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. It was probably true that in this church there were expressions of love, there were expressions of service, there were wonderful activities.

But those activities and expressions of love and devotion were insufficient and unacceptable in God's sight. They did not meet the standard that God himself has set.

[ 8 : 52 ] They met the standard that the church had set. But before God, they were insufficient and unacceptable. If you want to put it in a different way, it is like a religion that never got off or got past its infant stage.

It is a spiritual life that never came to maturity and rather became complacent. Here was a church that was so complacent that it was unable to distinguish between the peace of well-being and the peace of death.

For many of them, the peace of death was misconstrued and misunderstood as a peace of spiritual well-being. Their religion and their spirituality was half-hearted.

Their devotion was half-hearted. And they were Christian in them alone. And of course, we are not surprised that this church was not being persecuted at all.

It was so lifeless that there was nothing to persecute. There was no point of having trials of faith. There was nothing there to be worried about. But from the perspective of the church as studies, everything was fine.

[ 10 : 19 ] And of course, this raises a serious, disturbing question. How does a spiritually dead church, how does a spiritually dead Christian come to the conclusion that it is alive or that he or she is spiritually alive?

How does that happen? I think the answer is simple. When a church begins to ignore the truth that the measure of spiritual life is God's word and begins to believe that the measure of spiritual life is my personal experience or the press that I'm getting out there or my life measured with the lives of other people who are less righteous than I am, then we come to the conclusion that we must be doing very, very well.

And I think that's what happened here. Their outward programs were very attractive and they stopped listening to God and began to listen to the press outside.

I want to say to us as St. John's it is important for us as individuals and as a congregation to always engage in the spiritual discipline of self-examination and it is a self-examination that must be measured in accordance with the word of God and not in accordance with those people out there who are sinful people because whenever we do that we come up very, very righteous and self-sufficient and we will end up a self-indulgent self-congratulating congregation that thinks that we are alive but indeed in God's sight we are dead.

And I think I need to say this the sort of spiritual life that seeks for comfort and safety and conflict-free spirituality is a spirituality that is heading towards spiritual death.

[ 12 : 37 ] God's call upon our lives will inevitably involve conflict and discomfort and sometimes we may not feel safe in the pursuit of the will of God.

the church had said this had become comfortable and they had learned wonderfully to accommodate themselves to the culture and there was nothing to worry about and Satan wasn't worried one single moment.

I also want to ask you as a person and all of us here that how many of us here are so convinced that we are Christian and yet we are not asking ourselves the question on what basis do we know that?

I grew up in a Christian home where I went to church actually I was made to go to church so I went to church I went along because you had to go and at some point in my life I came to the conclusion that I was a wonderful Christian and I worked very hard to be good and the very first time a friend of mine spoke to me about the gospel I said to him I'm already a Christian I've been baptized I've been confirmed I go to church what else is there to do?

And it took a number of years before my eyes were opened to say that I was just a Christian in name without any personal commitment to the salvation and the lordship of Jesus Christ I was basically running my own life doing my own thing minding my own business and at the same time claimed that I was following Jesus Christ what a contradiction I want to say to us once again brothers and sisters that the signs of spiritual death begin to show when we ignore the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit when it becomes comfortable for us when we ignore and excuse our sin spiritual death is there when we begin to love good sermons and good music and good programs but are unwilling to walk the way of costly discipleship many of you have heard about [ 15 : 16 ] Lord Melbourne who was Queen Victoria's first prime minister he expressed the kind of dead religion in this way he said you know that things have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to start being personal you know that things have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to start being personal this is the kind of religion that refuses to be personal speaks in general terms and lacks spiritual clarity and precision and this has been the problem with Anglicanism we have lacked precision we've been as vague as we can and it's causing us a lot of grief today and so it is possible for us to have wonderful music and a wonderful sanctuary and for this church to be filled up every

Sunday morning and still be dead spiritually because we are not listening to God we are not being faithful to his word we are doing our own thing in the name of God and that is a dangerous place to be it is costly so the state of deadness was the condition of the church in Sardis and the condition of many churches today but here is the good news in verse 4 Jesus said in the midst of your deadness you have still a few names in Sardis people who have not soiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy in the midst of this complacent congregation there was a remnant a godly remnant who were faithful to Christ who had not soiled their garments with spiritual and moral impurity they remained faithful to him in doctrine and faith and worship and life they were devoted to

Christ they were not just active in church they allowed the mind of God to take hold of their own minds and they allowed the will of God to control their own wills and they let the Holy Spirit run their lives rather than they themselves their lives are characterized by love loyalty genuine service and total devotion to Jesus Christ and to his church and to those who are faithful who refuse to be soiled Jesus makes a promise in verse 5 he who conquers shall be clad in white garments and I will not blot his name out of the book of life I will confess his name before my father and before his holy angels it is possible to be faithful in a dead church it is possible to be faithful in a country where God is not honored and the promise of those who are faithful to those who conquer the hindrances to faith is that they will be clothed in the eternal purity and holiness and victory of God and on the final day the Lord himself will confess their names before his father that they are indeed members of the household of faith but to the rest of the complacent church which of course was the majority Jesus gives two commands to them and what Jesus is saying here are the things that spiritual dead churches need to listen to and when we are spiritually dead as individuals these are things that are very important for us to pay attention to the first thing that Jesus says to them is that they should wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die spiritual slumber and self deception are dangerous and the way to get out is to wake up wake up and stop deceiving yourself wake up and examine yourself in accordance with the word of God awake and arise from spiritual slumber and

strengthen what remains and is about to die of course the point is that if we do not wake up and strengthen and nurture the truth that we already have the time will come that even the little truth that you have is going to die and result in eternal death secondly

Jesus said remember what you have heard and received obey it and repent what did they hear they heard the word of God that's what they heard when they come to Christ and Jesus said the path of renewal is to remember to go back to what you have heard the word of God that you have heard and to remember what you received what did they receive they received Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives they received the Holy Spirit when they came to faith and Jesus said the path of renewal is to remember the word of God that you have heard and to remember the Jesus and the Spirit that you have received and keep that word and turn towards God the path to repentance begins with remembrance and as we remember what God has spoken to us then it is possible for the Spirit to begin to renew us and there is a clear danger if we do not listen he says remember then what you received and heard keep that and repent if you will not awake

[ 21 : 52 ] I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you it's a clear warning that Jesus is not going to let the church drift as far as it wants to drift the time will come when Jesus will come suddenly with a surprise and he will take away the lamp stand and that church will just continue as if nothing happened that is the greatest danger of spiritual death it is to continue without the power of God without the presence of God without the righteousness of God as they feel that everything is in place and I think it is a particularly serious thing for us at St.

John's in these perillious times that the light will not be focused on the people outside they send us out there it is a very dangerous thing to do we need to examine our own selves and make sure that we ourselves are right with God and that's why I want to conclude by asking you to do two things and asking myself to do two things we are called to continually examine the real state of our hearts before God what is the real state of your heart and what is the real state of St.

John's Shaughnessy what is God saying secondly and lastly we are called to entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ because he is the one who is the author of life and he is the one that has the seven spirits of God in his right hand and what we need at this point in time in our lives is the fullness of the spirit and when we turn to Jesus Christ in prayer and asking for the fullness of the spirit he will give us the fullness of the spirit and it is the fullness of the spirit that will help us to awake from spiritual slumber and to remember what we have heard and received and begin to walk in the newness of life in the power of the holy spirit in a life of obedience and faithfulness to Christ amen to the light