

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 29 JULY 2012 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 18:12

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm 36:3

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 25:2

Law

Psalm: 25:2

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 47:1

Scripture reading: Revelation 3

Scripture text: Revelation 3:1c

I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.
(Revelation 3:1c)

Have you ever considered the possibility of the Lord giving our congregation, or even possibly you and me, such a testimonial like this? A testimonial devoid of containing any praises whatsoever?

Take note of the following matters:

- 1. The image held by Sardis**
- 2. The image the Lord has of Sardis**
- 3. The mistake made by the congregation**
- 4. Application**

1. The image held by Sardis

Carefully consider the reality of the congregation of Sardis.

- They were resident in a wonderful and rich city.
- They were an excellent congregation because they had no false doctrine like the other congregations – they did not have the Nicolaitans hated by the Lord and they also did not have prophets like Jezebel of Thyatira.
- With the other congregations they had the name of being a beautiful and advancing congregation.
 - That means that their church council as well as their deacons performed very well.
 - The church-council was consequent in their visiting of the members and the maintenance of church discipline.

The members were definitely very devoted and they knew exactly what went on in their church and therefore did not follow heretics.

- This means that the members must have had good knowledge of the Bible and the confession of the church.
- This is why they were not caught up in heresy.

These matters were factual because the Lord Himself said: **...you have a name that you are alive**

- In other words all the other congregations also had the same impression!
- The congregation of Sardis certainly had the image of a church where everything was in full order.

Let us consider the history and condition of the people of Sardis – not just the congregation, but the entire community.

- During the times of the old history that city was taken over twice in a surprise attack.

- None of the times was during a large assault. Every time the city was taken over because the inhabitants of Sardis were not vigilant enough.
- They displayed weak military discipline. Consider how ridiculous it must be should you have an army and your land is taken over without you even knowing that you are under attack.

A typical characteristic of the Sardis inhabitants was negligence.

In their church they displayed the same characteristic.

- The Jews did not, like the congregation of Smyrna, oppress them.
- Also the heathen did not, like the congregation of Pergamos, persecute them.
- They also did not experience the internal decay like for example Thyatira who had to struggle with heretics.

Everything was ideal – but still they died whilst appearing to be living.

2. The image the Lord has of Sardis

Then suddenly this shock hits them: The Lord Himself removed this image from the congregation.

- It happened in this way: A messenger arrived at the congregation, bearing a letter written by the apostle John.
- Everybody knew John because he was the reverent of the Ephesians and at that stage was taken into exile on the island of Patmos.

Now carefully consider what took place! The news of the letter spread fast through the congregation.

- Sunday everybody went to church because they had the habit of, during the service, reading the letters from the apostles to the congregation.
- Because this letter was important the entire congregation was present
- There was also tension because they wanted to hear what was being said about them.

Then the terrible shock. John did not write the letter.

- It is the Lord sending the message that He knows exactly what is happening in every church.
- And to the congregation of Sardis He had no kind words.
- Yes, the Lord wrote, I know that the other congregations regard you as excellent, but I know that you are dead.

3. The mistake made by the congregation

What was wrong?

- That congregation evolved into a name-Christianity. Therefore the Lord records His letter to them in our Bible!
- Be warned that a congregation can build up an image of life, whilst in it's being it is completely dead.

The image can be very strong because the entire church community could not find a fault with that congregation.

- Now you start wondering what a congregation must do to be regarded by the Lord as alive.
- The congregation of Sardis did everything imaginable and also did it very well.

The answer is that it does not deal with the exterior but with the interior.

- A congregation only really lives when it radiated the shining light of the working of God's Holy Spirit-
- When it is clear that every member has become a tool of the Lord and appreciate and use the gifts of Christ's atonement.

Let us put it more practical: Only when a congregation truly displays and experience daily conversion is it proof that there is no death inside that congregation. Such a congregation lives.

- At the beginning of the Lord's letter to the church of Sardis the Lord could say nothing good.
- Later on the Lord does say that not everybody in the congregation of Sardis is lost.
- There are still some true believers in the congregation following the living fruit of God – they kept themselves clean from the taints of the world.

4. Application

How does the Lord regard our congregation? Looking at the visible matters it seems as if our church is still alive.

- We are not many, but with every service there are a reasonable number of us joining in worship.
- The church counsel undertakes regular house visitations – like the congregation of Sardis.

The main question is whether everything is as well as it could be?

- The problem with Sardis was that they had no self-knowledge. The reality, because they did not reflect deep enough about their principles and how a person, really knowing God, must live, passed them by.
- Therefore to the exterior they did everything that had to be done, but towards the interior there was no real conversion.

This type of thing is often found with believers.

- We must always remember the following in our lives of faith: You do not reason from the side of sin towards God.
- You reason from God down to the sin. This means that you cannot take the sin as the starting point and then want to find a way of getting past God with it.

You must start with God. His Holiness puts specific demands to you.

- In these demands are things you must do and also other things you may not do.
- That what you may not do is sin.

- Because God delivers judgement about the things that are not right, we out of love for God and in obedience to Him, stay away from it.

Set your sights to living in the holiness of God.

Sardis must have experienced the most unpleasant moments of their existence when listening to the contents of this letter. But what could they do?

- The deciding judgement and knowledge is with the Lord, He knows what is right or wrong. We all know that there is a certain amount of similarity between the congregation of Sardis and ourselves.
- Therefore, in this letter, we must realize the hope and love God granted us.

Should the Lord have thought that there was no hope for a congregation being external, He definitely would not have wasted His time writing this letter to them.

- What even enlarges the hope further is the fact of the Lord writing that they should be wake-up.
- They must strengthen **those who are on the point of dying**.
- Thus a change must occur quickly and decisively in the congregation. Salvation is possible.

The entire letter to the congregation of Sardis is focussed in the words: **For I have not found your works being fulfilled before God.**

- A literal translation of the Greek would read: **because I did not find your works fulfilled to the eyes of God.**
- This is the crux of the matter. It is of no use having great excellence here on earth. This excellence of yours must reach the heavens!
- It must thus survive the time – but even more, it must also survive the test of authenticity.
- Should your works not be distinguished thereby, then your works are not really effective.

The life of a congregation on earth must thus find resonance into heaven. Now you could wonder: Did they not have services and did everything needed to be done by a church?

- Yes, they did, but in such a way that it never reached the Lord.
- The contact between the congregation and the Lord was disrupted by the members – they were dead in faith.
- All this whilst the people noticed nothing externally.

In this letter the Lord preaches a lot of grace. There is time to come to conversion.

- Do we possibly have members externally joining to the life of faith, but internally having no genuine need to go with God?
- You know, we have no reason to struggle with the faith, because our Lord Jesus indeed died so that we may be a living church.

In fact it is the faith-death of the chosen that, through the ages, caused the Lord Jesus to have to hang on the cross.

- By His death the Holy Spirit descended over the church, working the living faith inside of us. By power Jesus thus broke the death away from us and granted us life.
- When the Lord Jesus arose from death, those who was spiritually dead, shuddered – those on the earth and those in hell.

Keep in mind that it is this same Jesus who wrote the letter to Sardis.

- His call to the church is as clear as a bell: Let your faith remain alive, as it was when you received it from the Lord.
- This God of life comes again and then He will judge over those who died in their faith.
- The Bible teaches that every eye will see Him when He arrives to execute this deed. Also us and Sardis!

We are preparing for Holy Communion. At any rate every true believer makes it his task to recondition his relationship with the Lord in such times:

- He reflects about his sins and his negligence.
- But he also positively reflects about everything he could do in living out his faith better and also what he could do to better worship and honour the Lord.

The grace of the Lord is that He allows all of us to still exist worshipping and honoring Him.

- Let us then richly use the grace of God and see to it that we are a congregation living in faith.
- Let us also repent where we sin.
- But, on the other side, let us in everything we do, powerfully unfold our faith.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 68:2

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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 Helping Reverend
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 29 July 2012
 Scripture Modern King James Version