

“THE SLEEPY CHURCH”
Revelation 3:1-6

Sermon for Peace Church
September 23, 2007

PURPOSE - To awaken people out of the sin of sloth - living trivial lives - and lead them to engage according to our ministry’s founding vision.

MAIN IDEA - In a day that encourages trivial living, Jesus calls us to wake up and continue with the kingdom vision for which he has called us.

I. INTRODUCTION

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation 3:1

1. A married couple were having an argument - so they decided not to speak to each other. Instead they wrote out their conversation on pieces of paper. As the evening concluded, Greg needed to be woken up by Kim at 7 AM in order to catch his 9:30 flight out of town. He went to bed early, but wrote down his need to be woken at 7:00 - and placed the paper where Kim would find it.

When morning came, Greg jumped out of bed, looked at his watch and saw that it was already 10:00 am.

“Why did Kim not wake me up?”, he wondered ... until he looked down on the bed and saw a piece of paper stating, “WAKE UP IT’S 7 A.M.!!”

2. Jesus’ ministry, it’s been said, is to comfort the disturbed ... and disturb the comfortable.

This morning, through his letter to the church in Sardis, Jesus calls His people to WAKE UP!

(i) His wake-up call is written on a piece of paper. - WILL WE HEAR IT?

A. We can, if we listen to the Spirit - Everyone of these letters in Rev. 2 & 3 (we’re now on the 5th one) concludes:

He who has an ear, let him HEAR what the Spirit says to the churches!

3. Speak, Lord, as we read your Word: *Read Rev. 3:1-6*

II. SLOTH IN THE CHURCH

1. This letter is UNIQUE among the 7 that Jesus gives ... IN A SAD WAY!
Sardis is a church that has little, if anything, that Jesus COMMENDS.
- It is a church that needs to WAKE UP ... a SLEEPY CHURCH.

(i) Actually, it's condition is what the early church fathers called SLOTHFUL!

SLOTH - is an old English word which refers to people who are, not so much lazy, as DISENGAGED ... SLUGGISH of spirit ... LACKING PASSION & conviction.

A. *SLOTH*, Henry Fairlie writes, "*is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing ... and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.*"

B. Frederick Buechner adds, "*It is a man going through the motions, flying on automatic pilot - like a man with a bad head cold - who has mostly lost his sense of taste & smell. He knows something's wrong with him - but not wrong enough to do something about. Other people come and go, but through glazed eyes he hardly notices them. He is letting things run their course. He's just getting through his life.*" SLOTH IS LIVING WITH GLAZED EYES

(ii) I was listening to NPR Radio this week and they had an interview with a Roseland police officers who was bemoaning the fact that, though there was a public gun-slaying of a teenage girl in Roseland this summer, they cannot get anyone yet from the community to come forward with information that could lead to the arrest of the murderer!

- that's SLOTH in that community - "believing in nothing, caring for nothing interfering with nothing". There may be some fear there too in that silence. Nevertheless the condition describes the people who won't stand up for things that matter ... who will only look after their own skin, and not about right and wrong ... going through the motions of life.

(iii) A class of highschool students was once asked, "What are some things in life that you would be willing to die for?"

Your parents? Your friends? Your pet? The honor of Christ?
True story - One by one, they decided - in this class - that really there was nothing they valued that much in life to the extent that they would die for it.

The questioner then asked rhetorically, “If there’s nothing you’d die for ... then what are you living for?”

(iv) Sardis was a complacent, indifferent group of Christians.

There’s was an INOFFENSIVE Christianity. They lived in the same context as the other 6 churches, but they never, for example:

- pressed the Jews in their city with the claim that Jesus is God.
- never countered the Roman claim that Caesar is Lord
- never took a stand against sexual immorality in the culture.

There’s was the COMFORTABLE PEW.

2. The church fathers labeled sloth one of the 7 deadly sins - along with pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony and anger.

(i) Sloth is deadly because of the damage it does to the soul.

It makes our lives TRIVIAL states Victor Shepherd. Listen to this quote: *People who detach themselves from life with all of its tides and turbulence; people who want no part of challenge and struggle; these people invariably have large tracts of time on their hands. What do they do with vast stretches of unfilled time? They fill them up with trivia. They watch TV by the hour. They sleep. They become self-absorbed. Their self-absorption can appear harmless (they have huge stamp collections); it can appear eccentric (they become experts in the history of dental floss); it can be silly; it can be dangerous (since ever-greater thrills are needed to stave off the boredom of the under-occupied). In any case the self-absorption is SELFIST, even when it appears virtuous. (What else can be said of the 50-year old woman who spends 3 hours per day shaping her body? We won’t say “She has a remarkable body”. We won’t say it because the truth is, her remarkable body has been gained at the price of a shriveled heart and mind and spirit.) Where sloth abounds, relationships wither ... and time fills up with trivia as surely as motionless water fills up with algae.*

- What an INDITEMENT of life in a self-gratifying, drowsy culture!

A. Jesus said, “In the last days THE LOVE OF MOST WILL GROW COLD!”
= “shriveled hearts & minds”, because of a slothful ... disengaged ... selfist spirit!

You have a reputation for being alive, Jesus says to Sardis ... but you are dead!

3. Sloth not only grows because of ungodly influences in culture, it also grows when we live on PAST REPUTATION.

- Sardis had a “reputation of being alive”, Jesus says.

This church was living in past glory ... “remember the days when ...” = pride in the past.

(i) That’s how sloth grew in Peter when he fell asleep to his world in the Garden of Gethsemane.

> “I’ll never forsake you, even if the others do ... I’m the rock ... CEPHAS!”

- But his eyes glazed over ... and when the moment came, HE ultimately DISENGAGED ... & DENIED ... to save his own skin!

(i) Jesus says, “*WAKE UP! ... Strengthen what remains and is about to die - for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.*” (v. 2)

III. OVERCOMING SLOTH

Jesus calls His people to OVERCOME sloth / to “NIKE” selfist indifference to our world!

HERE’S HOW - verse 3:

1. “Remember what you’ve received and heard”

- When Jesus calls you, you are given a VISION to live ... and complete.

(i) Why are you called a Christian?

Do you “remember” what our catechism says? (A lot of you have received and heard this...):

I am called a Christian because I am a member of Christ and share in his anointing!

Just as He is THE prophet / priest and king of this world ... and He lives in me so that I live as a:

PROPHET - bringing the will of God to others

PRIEST - bringing others to God in prayer & service

KING - leading people into beauty, truth & goodness.

A. That’s why we’re saved - not just to wait for heaven and lead TRIVIAL, self-absorbed lives - but to get INVOLVED in the hearts of others ... to meet needs and confront injustice.

(ii) “Remember what you’ve received & heard”

Here’s the vision that Peace received & heard in its early years of ministry. When this building was dedicated 37 years ago, this statement was part of its dedication: (Screen)

OUR GOAL IS TO BE WHAT A CHURCH WAS MEANT TO BE:

We wish to be a COMMUNITY CHURCH,
formed out of the community and counting among our members
those of different national and denominational backgrounds.
And we desire to serve the community; to be a place where the weary can find rest,
where the lonely can find friends, where the guilt-ridden can find forgiveness,
where the lost can find their way, where people can find God.

We wish to be a FAMILY CHURCH,
where the needs of family members of every age level can be met,
where families learn to pray together and stay together.

We wish to be an OUTREACHING CHURCH,
which wants to share its faith, its hope its joy;
which reaches out not just to gain new members,
but because what it has is too good to keep for itself.

We wish to be a CONTEMPORARY CHURCH,
which is concerned to confront the current problems of society,
which strives to be relevant in its preaching and up-to-date in its programs.

We wish to be a REFORMED CHURCH,
which recognizes that reformation is a constant process
and is willing to be reformed according to the word of God.

Above all, we wish to be a TRULY CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
where Christ is recognized as Savior and Lord,
where the “I think” of man is never substituted for the “God says” of the Bible,
where material things are not put ahead of spiritual things,
and where people practice what is preached.

“Remember what you have received and heard ... I’ve not yet found your deeds,

Peace Church, complete. CONTINUE ON!”

- Sloth is overcome by VISION - this is why we live!
- not to “Amuse ourselves to death” (Neil Postman)

2. “*Obey it and repent*” - Sloth is overcome by COURAGE OBEDIENCE & HUMBLE PRAYER!

- Like Pastor Joe Wright’s well-known prayer in the Kansas State Legislature a few years ago, confront sloth in society:

Forgive us, Heavenly Father, for calling evil good:

- *We have ridiculed the truth of Your Word and called it pluralism;*
- *We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery;*
- *We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation;*
- *We have endorsed perversion and called it alternative lifestyle;*
- *We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare*
- *We have killed our unborn and called it choice;*
- *We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable;*
- *We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem;*
- *We have abused power and called it political savvy;*
- *We have coveted our neighbor’s possessions and called it ambition;*
- *We have polluted the air with profanity and called it freedom of expression ...*

... Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; try us and see if there be any wicked way in us; cleanse us from every sin and set us free..

Don’t just drift along - stand up and matter for God!

3. Jesus warns those who are spiritually asleep to “wake up”, lest He come like a THIEF - unexpectedly - and take away what remnant of true life they have.

- Beware of living in the past with Jesus:
- > “I’ve done my profession of faith” ... all is well
- > “I went on a mission trip” ... all is fine

(i) Look for the opportunities EACH DAY to live with passion for Him.

IV. CONCLUSION

To those who overcome SPIRITUAL SLUMBER, Jesus here gives 2 PROMISES:

1. Verse 5 - *You will walk with me dressed in white*

WHITE DRESS - speaks of purity ... festivity & joy = the bride approaching

her groom

WHITE DRESS - is a symbol of justification - not that one's passion for God MERITS our justification, but it reveals that we have done nothing to forfeit it.

- Such lives, Jesus promises, *I will never blot out from the book of life.*

2. The other promises in verse 5 is that, come Judgment Day, Jesus will VOUCH for you.

- He will "acknowledge you before the Father and his angels"
= "*He's mine ... she's mine*"

- And when Jesus vouches for you, YOU'RE IN!!!

3. Jesus is Lord of those who STAY AWAKE - and bring their calling to completion!

- When you became a Christian, you were called to share in Jesus' anointing - prophet, priest, and kingly ministry is yours in this world ... don't live a life of trivia.

- When Peace Church was birthed, we were called - to be a community church, a family church, an outreaching, contemporary & reformed & truly Christian church ... let's not drift into irrelevance - but remain awake, being faithful to the challenge of our day.

4. Jesus' wake up call is WRITTEN ... and SPOKEN.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

AMEN