

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume IX

Issue 43

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

A ZOMBIE CHURCH

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Revelation 3:1

In the folklore and mythology of the pagan voodoo culture there supposedly exists creatures who are actually dead corpses which are animated by the incantations and occultic powers of its practitioners. These creatures are called “Zombies”, or the “living dead”, which walk around at the behest of their “masters” while being quite lifeless in themselves. In keeping with the natural proclivity of men towards such nonsense, there has arisen quite an interest in scary movies, video games, and TV programs which feature “zombies” as their subject matter.

Bro. Al Cloud has been sharing some excellent thoughts with us from his studies on the churches in the book of the Revelation of JESUS CHRIST. He made mention of the fact, the other day, that the church at Sardis is the “church of the living dead”. Thus it occurred to me that in the modern parlance we might refer to it as a Zombie Church.

Sardis was at one time a very rich and prosperous city. It is apparent that a church was once established there which prospered for a season as well. No doubt many had believed the gospel and come together in that city rejoicing together in one heart and accord to magnify the name of the LORD together and to strengthen one another in the most holy faith. Yet it is also quite apparent by the message sent to this church, that such was no longer the case.

The mindset of many is that a local church is primarily an organization which is established to maintain and perpetuate various religious traditions which its adherents believe to be proper and in many cases quite exclusively so. Thus they establish a “structure” which becomes vitally important to pass on from one generation to the next with the mistaken belief that it is this “structure” which insures its longevity, purity, and reason for existence. Now when I speak of a “structure”, I am not specifically referring to a house or building made of wood and stone. Yet it is amazing to see the parallels of the concept of the establishing of such houses with the notion of the supposed perpetuity of these ideas of a church’s “long term” continuation.

Since the natural man (the flesh) has a strong attraction to religion; it is not odd that men would ultimately become enamored of this “structure” and “form” and to begin to neglect the importance of the substance which it may have originated from. This is evidently what occurred in Sardis. If one had visited the church at Sardis on its meeting days, they probably were still doing the same things that they had done since its origin. Every thing was probably done decently and in order and if one was looking for tradition and form, they would be quite satisfied with what they found.

The woman at the well in Samaria, was typical of man’s religious flesh. She was interested in the proper place to worship. Yet the LORD overturned her religion when HE said, “*Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in*

spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:21-24)

There are many “churches” which continue on for years devoid of this vital ingredient, and sadly never even miss it since they are quite content with the form and tradition which hides their nakedness (from their own eyes) even as Sardis which had a name that they were alive, but were nonetheless dead. Some churches even mistake activity and excitement for spiritual life.

The LORD JESUS CHRIST said that HE would build HIS church and that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. I believe HE is doing so at the present time just as HE has ever since the day that HE declared HIS intent. Multitudes of “churches” have come and gone over the centuries. None of those mentioned in the Revelation are still around. It would seem quite apparent that the “church” which CHRIST would establish is not one particular organization nor one which has faithfully adhered to any particular form over time but rather that one which HE has caused to manifest itself in various locations at particular times according to HIS sovereign purpose.

It seems to me that the LORD raises up local congregations for a season with a particular lifespan and then when it pleases HIM, HE removes its candlestick. This leaves men with no place to glory except in HIM and causes the people of GOD to hunger for HIS presence rather than be sated with form and tradition.

Even in Sardis, the “church of the living dead,” the LORD had an elect people. (see Rev.3:4) Everyone who is a member of a “church” is not necessarily one of the elect, though it is the elect who are the called according to HIS purpose and it is for the benefit of the elect that HE establishes local churches. HE often manifests them by contrasting them to those who are enamored with religion and couldn’t care less if Ichabod is written on the doorposts. The people of GOD are precious in HIS sight and HE will preserve them according to HIS faithfulness.

The LORD will keep HIS own and will give them repentance and faith in HIS own time. (see Rev.3:5) Religious men are happy with their religion. But the children of GOD are made to be dissatisfied with the vanity of rote tradition and religiosity and equally fearful of that condition wherein every man does that which is right in his own eyes without regard to his brethren, who having seen, he is compelled to love and seek his benefit. *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” (1Cor 12:7) “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” (1John 4:20-21)*

Belovèd Saviour, faithful Friend, The joy of all thy blood-bought train,
In mercy to our aid descend, Or else we worship thee in vain.
In vain we meet to sing and pray, If Christ his influence withhold;
Our hearts remain as cold as clay, Till we the Lord by faith behold.
Here manifest thyself in peace; Thy tender mercies here make known;
O breathe on us a gale of grace, And send the cheering blessing down.
We humbly for thy coming wait, Seeking to know thee as thou art;
We bow as sinners at thy feet, And bid thee welcome to our heart.
Unite our hearts to thee, dear Lamb; Vouchsafe to join us all in one,
To love and praise thy gracious name, Until we meet around thy throne.

#952 Gadsby’s Hymns, by J. Allen

“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” (Psa 80:14-19)

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