

# Building Dedication 2001

## Selected Scripture

### Introduction

There have been some challenging times for our church over the past eight years when we might have thought we would never make it into our new building. Today, as we dedicate this building, we might think we have it made!

I am, however, becoming increasingly impressed with the truth that we are just beginning to do the work of the ministry. I am convinced that the great danger for any church body is the belief that they can coast.

On an occasion like the dedication of a campus like this, when we could easily polish a few apples, I instead want to sound a prophetic warning. I believe our church today faces greater threats to extinction than ever before. We might believe the lie that, "We have arrived."

### The Church in Sardis

There once was another church facing similar temptation – and it failed the test.

The surprising thing is that this church was known all around for being the church on the move! In fact, it had become as famous as the city where it was planted and where it grew to international fame.

The city was Sardis. It was the first city in ancient Greece to mint gold and silver for currency – which birthed modern money. Five major highways intersected at this metropolis, thus making it one of the great trading centers.

Sardis had perfected wool dying procedures, so the finest clothing of purple and gold and black were sold there. This earned Sardis the reputation as the shopping capital of ancient Lydia. It was probably busier than the outlet malls in our area today.

The church at Sardis was equally busy and dynamic. Well-known citizens attended and it had the activity of programs and busy hands. It was well oiled and had the reputation of being the exciting, alive church. The church at Sardis was the church to attend.

Any observer of this church would have said, "Certainly this church is seizing the significance of the moment."

However, the church went in for its annual physical – and the Great Physician wrote His report. We are given the opportunity to read it, beginning in Revelation 3:1.

***To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."***

Jesus says, "I see your prolific activity – you have action and deeds and have a reputation for being dynamic and effective. I hear the public applause – you have made a name for yourself and have influence. However, you have missed the mark completely."

The word "dead" refers to the lack of spiritual life and power in this church.

Now, if you had gone to the deacons or elders of this church in Sardis and said, "Listen, I've been coming here for about a year, and this place is dead."

*"Ha!"*

You would have been laughed at.

This is the reason this letter, in Revelation 3, begins with a reference to Christ who has the seven spirits of God. Seven is a number which represents completion or fullness. Jesus says, in other words, "I've got the full insight on the spirit of your church. I, the Divine Physician, have checked your spiritual vital signs and am pronouncing you lifeless!"

This is not a very nice thing to say, but it is true. Will the church listen?

Most often the church at large sounds like that eminent philosopher, the actor Rodney Dangerfield. After reviewing a series of X-rays with his doctor, he was told that he desperately needed surgery and it would cost thousands of dollars. Dangerfield thought for a minute, and then asked the doctor, "Would you be willing, for twenty-five bucks, to just touch up the X-rays?"

A large part of the problem for the average Christian is in believing that when Jesus Christ comes into our lives that He is only interested in touching up a few things. Perhaps He wants to change the curtains in our living room, and maybe even the wallpaper, if He is really going to be busy.

However, Jesus Christ does not come in to change the furniture around. He is not into redecoration, but reconstruction. He does not show up with a hammer and paint brush, but a bulldozer – and He starts from the ground up.

The average church is the same way. It thinks that if Christ were to show up, He would modify a few things and be on His way. But in this verse, He is talking to one of the most dynamic first century churches and is telling them that what they need is not a little plastic surgery, but open heart surgery.

Notice Revelation 3:2.

***Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.***

In other words, “You think you’ve arrived; you’re resting on past accomplishments, but you are in need of spiritual resuscitation.”

The church at Sardis had become lifeless and dull! In the same way today, people clock in regularly at places of worship that are without spiritual life.

This is illustrated best I think, by the man who went to see his doctor about his snoring problem. The doctor listened to him, and then asked, “Does your snoring disturb your wife?”

He said, “Are you kidding? It disturbs the entire congregation!”

The church in Sardis and the church in Cary face the same threat – activity without forward motion.

## **The Church is to Wake Up!**

Now the command to “wake up,” in Revelation 3:2, is the Greek word “gregoreuo”. It is an imperative, which can be rendered, “Be alert!”

This word appears several times in the New Testament. In the rest of our discussion today, we will look at a few of these references.

### **1. First, the church is to wake up to the mandate of intercession.**

Turn to Colossians 4:2.

***Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert [!] in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;***

What if we mirrored the words of Samuel for his generation when he said,

***. . . God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you . . . (I Samuel 12:23 KJV)***

What if we caught the passion of Jesus Christ who wept over the city of Jerusalem?

Has it ever occurred to you that you can pray for the people in your company and in your neighborhood? The truth is, if you are not praying for Hewlett Packard, or IBM, or the Wake County Educational system, or your neighbors, who in the world will?

Why is it that one of the most difficult things for us to do is to consistently pray? Why is it that when someone mentions the subject of prayer, everyone knows they should do more of it?

Wake up to the overlooked fact that when Jesus Christ was discipling His twelve, He never taught them how to plant a church; He never gave them a play-by-play on how to hold evangelistic crusades or how to write a book or how to preach a sermon. The only thing on which Jesus ever gave the disciples a step-by-step manual was how to pray.

Without intercession, we will have movement without forward motion.

### **2. Secondly, the church is to wake up to the ministry of representation.**

Notice as Paul carries his request further in Colossians 4:3-4,

***praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;***

***that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.***

Paul was always eminently excited about the future. One of his favorite phrases was “an open door”.

In these verses, Paul says, “Pray for us so that we don’t miss an opportunity for the word to make an impact.”

Did you notice the urgency?

The church is often less passionate about sharing the truth of the gospel as representatives of Christ than are those who do not believe in Jesus Christ.

I cannot help but think of one religious organization that denies the deity of Jesus Christ, yet every adult member is expected to spend a minimum of three hours a week knocking on doors and canvassing neighborhoods. I have read that they consider their job incomplete unless each home is visited at least seven times.

Jared Hardie, the public relations officer for the national magazine of this organization, said in an interview, "Our whole lifestyle revolves around our obligation to witness. We have five hours of meetings each week in addition to our personal study to prepare for the job."

Look at II Corinthians 5:18-20.

***Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,***

***namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.***

***Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***

Talk about a passionate representative for the cause of Christ!

We have the truth in our hands – have you shared it with someone else? Or, are you content with several thousand people showing up at church on Sunday, as if that is all there is to it?

A few years ago I had an interesting experience. Two young men from France had come to the United States to visit – it was their first time in America. One evening, we went to a Durham Bulls baseball game. What is a look at America without a hot dog with mustard and chili sauce, a coke, and sitting on hard bleachers surrounded by several thousand out of control pagans, who throughout the course of the game alternate between anger and ecstasy?

It did not occur to me that these men knew absolutely nothing about baseball, so I explained the system. First, I explained the scoreboard in the outfield and what the numbers meant. Then, with the

first batter, I had to explain three strikes and four balls, etc. Finally, the first Bulls player hit a solid grounder between short and second and got on first base. We cheered and hooted.

They asked, "Was that a score?"

I said, "No, he has to run all the way to second base, and then to third, and then cross home plate before the Bulls can score."

They thought that was a lot to do. They even asked, "If the batter doesn't make it to first base in time, can he run back to home plate?"

I said, "Only in the pee wee league. Never mind – no, they can't run backwards in this game."

It is interesting that in baseball, winning the game is determined, not by hits, but by runs. The player who gets to second base never gets credit for half a run. The player who hits a triple and stands at third base does not earn three-quarters of a run.

Why then, is it so tempting to believe that if we can build a building and get people to fill it up, we are scoring runs?

This may represent a lot of motion, but it is not forward movement! In fact, we have barely gotten to first base.

If it were the other way around, you and I could spend our time slapping each other on the back.

Since moving in this building, we have had, on several Sundays mornings, as many as 3,000 people attend. At this time, there are only 187 churches in America with that many and more on Sunday morning.

If this were impressive to God, then today, we could expect to get a commendation from God, "Well done – you've built a beautiful building! Well done – you've hit 3,000 attendees!"

However, it is not hits that matter, but how many runs. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ spelled out what a run across home plate looks like. He gave, what we call, the Great Commission.

***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,***

***teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

***(Matthew 28:19-20)***

Let me make this analogy crystal clear. The church is up to bat:

- it shares the gospel with someone who is not a Christian – great, the church is on first base;
- it leads that person to Jesus Christ – praise the Lord, the church is on second base, but should not stop;
- it disciples that individual – the church is on third base;
- if and when that individual assimilates into the life of the church and begins to reproduce themselves by serving Jesus Christ in their world and in the lives of others – with that person, the church has crossed home plate.

## **Conclusion**

Wake up to the mandate of intercession and the ministry of representation!

Should there be activity? Yes. Should there be lots of motion? Yes.

However, more importantly, there should be forward motion and advancement for the glory of God and the eternal cause of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.