**WAKE UP !**

***A Letter From Heaven***

What if the church received a very important looking document by overnight certified mail, stamped “Urgent!” You can see the postage was $45 and came in a “*Classified*” package. On the top left corner at the return address was hand-written the name “Jesus: Heaven.” No prankster is going to go to that trouble and expense to write the church, so curiously, even anxiously, you open the envelope and pull out what appears to be a very expensive feeling parchment. In beautiful calligraphy you read the following words:

**“To the angel of the church in New Hope Minnesota write, ‘The words of Him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die! I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard. Keep it! Repent! If you will not wake up I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come against you! Yet you have still a few names in New Hope, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy! The One who conquers will be clothed in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the church!”**

Most of you immediately recognize that this was an actual letter written by the hand of Jesus to a real church in ancient Asia (modern day Turkey) about 1,920 years ago. The church was not New Hope, but Sardis. I’m very confident that when they got together on the Lord’s Day and read it publicly that it caused a major crisis in its membership. Many in that church were blindsided, not seeing this coming at all. You can imagine everyone beginning to look at each other with suspicion. Suddenly, a church that had felt very comfortable in its “*faithful*” status, believing it was a “*sound*” congregation, were now jolted out of their security and were confronted with a life-and-death decision.

Their reputation in the brotherhood had been sterling. They were known as an active, alive, vibrant church all over Asia. But now Christ, whose name they wore, was threatening to strip them of that name and declare them D.O.A. In that famous church, which was now about to take on the infamy of Judas Iscariot, the old 80 / 20 Rule was being practiced. 20% were doing all the faithful works, while 80% were riding their coattails, hoping to get to heaven on reputation alone. Jesus hereby exposes them. No one will be written into “*The Book of Life,*” or have their name confessed by Jesus to the Father or the angels, based on local church membership! Every Christian must stand alone before the Lord and be judged on their own life’s story.

Sardis was told twice to “Watch!” Those citizens knew all too well their ancient history of why Jesus would use that word for them. In the time of Isaiah (700 B.C.) Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world. The King of Lydia ruled, bringing to it great wealth, luxury and magnificent architecture. It was a great military power with obvious geographical advantages. It sat on a 1500 foot plateau with sheer cliffs surrounding it for protection. It seemed impregnable and invincible. It had a river running through it for a water supply. But that river not only brought water, but gold! King Croesus had discovered it, bringing great riches to the city. The wealth and natural fortifications caused the citizens to become over-confident in their security.

Cyrus the Great of Persia laid siege to Sardis, knowing he could never storm it and win. One day he offered to his army a great reward to any man who could discover a weakness in Sardis’ defense. One of his men happened to see a Sardian soldier drop his helmet from the cliff. He then saw him come down through a crack in the ledge, retrieve his helmet, and dash back into the crack. He told Cyrus of this incident, who sent a troop into the crack that very night. They penetrated the city, found it unguarded, opened the gates, allowing the Persian forces to rush in and destroy it.

Centuries later, in the days of Alexander the Great’s quest for empire, he rebuilt Sardis, once again making it a great city. Upon Alexander’s death, Antiochus, one of his four generals who divided the empire, found refuge in Sardis when he was hunted by another of Alexander’s generals trying to gain sole power. He felt secure in this “impregnable” fortress, safely defending it for over a year. But once again, while asleep on watch, the enemy slipped through the same crack in the cliff, opened the gates, killing Antiochus.

Now you know why Jesus used the cry, “***Be watchful***!” (Rev. 3:2,3). The history of the city served notice of their real danger. Not being watchful, not being awake, was the historical legacy of Sardis. But as terrible as a military defeat might seem, it pales into insignificance compared to Christ finding His people asleep on duty. The church in Sardis soon vanished into oblivion. We can only speculate as to when their doors were finally bolted shut, never to open again. It makes us weep to think of their fate, both in history and at judgment day.

But what if that letter at the top of this article were actually written to us? Would you be in that “***few*** *names who have not soiled their garments*”? Or, would you be in that “*I have not found your works complete*”? Most churches, like most corporations, stay functional because of the 80 / 20 Rule. I don’t believe that number is close to that here, but even if it were 99 / 1 we should still be frightened and anxious, knowing that one soul was in eternal danger. As a shepherd my task is to “*feed the flock*” of the Chief Shepherd (I Pet. 5:2). If He would leave the 99 to rescue the one, perhaps this will serve as warning to us here to “***Wake Up***!”

Until tomorrow… Watch and pray! Look around. Which soul(s) needs my help?

I love you.

– Rick