

Date:

The early Church of Jesus

PRAY Father, I want to be 'dead to sin' but 'alive to God' (Romans 6:11). Please show me how I can do that today.

READ Revelation 3:1–13

REFLECT

Years ago I attended an urban church that some of my friends thought was dead. It was part of a denomination that was drifting away from the Bible. The church was located in a difficult neighbourhood and we struggled to maintain a large stone building that hadn't been filled in 50 years. But a small group of us began meeting in a side chapel once each week to pray for the church. As a result, God did a wonderful thing: he didn't suddenly fill the pews, but he made those of us who prayed spiritually alive.

The church in Sardis (3:1–6) This was the reverse of that urban church I attended. It had 'a reputation of being alive' (3:1). Today, everyone wants to be part of a successful church. Mega-churches attract the best preachers, the most money and the largest congregations. But is that what Jesus wants? Not necessarily. Even though the church in Sardis had everything going for it, Jesus considered it dead. Why? Because its members weren't fully obeying the basic teachings of the gospel (3:2,3). That can happen if we focus on a few 'precious promises' but aren't committed to reading and applying all parts of the Bible, for example. Without that, Jesus says to the church in Sardis, 'you are not completely obeying God' (3:2, CEV).

The church in Philadelphia (3:7–13) Like the church at Smyrna, these believers didn't look successful; they were weak and facing opposition (3:8,9). But they got the main things right: 'You obeyed my word and did not deny me' (3:8, NLT).

Perhaps the most encouraging thing from this passage is that whether you find yourself in a dead church or one that is truly alive, Jesus says you will 'walk with me' (3:4) if you remain faithful to him and his Word. The best reason to read and live out the full message of the Bible is not so that we can be 'holier than thou'; it's so that we can be closer to Jesus.

APPLY Do you think Jesus would consider your church dead or alive? Why?

PRAY Spend this time praying for your church and for all the churches near where you live.

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PRAY 'Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!' (Psalm 66:20).

READ Revelation 3:14–22

REFLECT

People who are passionate about God today are often labelled 'extremists'. A society that worships a valueless form of tolerance is threatened by anyone who knows what they believe and is willing to talk about it. Of course, we shouldn't try to cram our beliefs down the throats of others; that does more harm than good. But there's nothing wrong with making God our first priority; that's what he wants (Matthew 6:33).

The church in Laodicea (3:14–22) No one would ever accuse the church in Laodicea of being a bunch of religious extremists; they were lukewarm for God, and that really bothered Jesus (3:15,16). Being lukewarm still bothers Jesus. For the Laodiceans, it was wealth that had dulled their passion for the things of God (3:17). Those of us who have material possessions should be thankful for what we have, but we should also heed this warning to the Laodiceans; it's impossible to love both God and money (Matthew 6:24). It's like trying to marry two people at the same time; it just doesn't work.

There are two other ideas in this passage worth pondering:

God wants us to repent (3:19). There is a connection between discipline and love. Sometimes we think that when bad things happen, God is out to get us. True, he's out to get us to repent, as Jesus makes clear. The fact is, God has an extreme love for us, so much so that he sent his Son to die for our sins (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9).

Jesus wants to be with us (3:20). This word picture communicates how much Jesus wants to be with us. When I was growing up, it seemed like every Sunday School classroom in the world had the same picture of a fair-haired Jesus knocking on a door in some garden. Those pictures may have been over-sentimental, but they taught me an important truth: Jesus is waiting for me to invite him into my life.

APPLY How would you characterise your relationship with Jesus right now – on fire, on ice or lukewarm?

PRAY What one way could you show your love for God this week, no matter what people think about you?