

# Revelation 3:1–6

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Date: 27 April 2008

Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[ 0 : 00 ] Today's scripture reading can be found in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verses 1 through 6, which is page 1029 in the Blue Bibles provided for you.

Please stand and join me in the reading of God's word. And to the angel of the church in Sardis 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 and strengthen what remains and is about to die. For I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

Remember then what you received and heard. Keep it and 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 Sardis, 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 thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

[ 1 : 14 ] 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 churches. This is the word of God. Good afternoon to you.

What a glorious afternoon we have shared with the people of God as we have welcomed people into our faith family as well as into our local church.

And we are delighted in the goodness of God through his Son. Won't you pray with me? Lord, we worship you and we give thanks to you for all that you are for us and to us through Jesus.

So, Lord, this service, all of it, including what I prepared, may it be an offering to you. May you be glorified in it.

May there be fruit for the glory of God and for the good of the gospel in this city and in our world. It's our prayer in Christ's name.

[ 2 : 32 ] Amen. Amen. We come this afternoon to the fifth church, five of seven in Revelation chapters two and three.

Though these marvelous words were written to the church in first century A.D., they have a way of reverberating, echoing down through the centuries.

And the word of God comes to you and to me today here in 21st century Chicago. We notice in chapters one through three, Jesus appears as the judge of his church.

The last later chapters will reveal him as the righteous judge of ungodly nations. But first, judgment begins in the house of God.

Peter reminds us of that in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 17. This is what he says. For it is time for judgment to begin in the household of God.

[ 3 : 43 ] And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God? So we see Jesus revealed as the judge of his church, the glorified Christ.

And he walks in the midst of his churches and he holds the angels of the churches in his hands.

When I was growing up, there were several character building rites of passage that came either in the mid or my late teen years.

Going to the military was one of the paths that were a rites of passage of sorts. Building character in young men and starting them, orienting them, some of them reorienting them on the path of life.

And some have benefited from that experience even today. But also in the mid to late teens, we were coming into our first real jobs where we were getting a paycheck.

Back in the day, we found ourselves, we gravitated toward food service kinds of things. Some of you may know about it.

[ 5 : 03 ] Others, it's foreign. Others, it's foreign. Found ourselves being dishwashers or busboys. That's where you take the dishes off the table and take them back to the kitchen.

But then others of us found ourselves working at the all-American restaurant, McDonald's. And this was early in the fast food era.

And you could live large on a dollar back then. I mean, you could get an order of fries, a hamburger, and a milkshake for 50 cents and still have 50 cents left over.

You can't date on a dollar anymore, can you? But if you were a McDonald's owner-operator doing business under the banner of the golden arches, you were expected to do things by McDonald's book.

And not doing things by the McDonald's way would put franchisees at risk of losing their license to do business.

[ 6 : 15 ] Periodically, the bigwigs would show up. When I was in Kansas City, the bigwigs would come down from Chicago. And they were looking and booking. They were inspecting to see if we were meeting the McDonald's standards.

I mean, those big walk-in coolers had to be, it was a solution called Pearl Bright. And you had to wash them and no fingerprints on those things, huh?

Things had to be done the McDonald's way, huh? The church in this world has been charged with doing business, occupying, Luke chapter 19, verse 13 says, until he comes.

Another translation says that to engage in doing business. That is what the church does in this world. Well, we're not here to do our own thing.

We're not here to craft an agenda of our own pleasing. We already have our marching orders from Jesus. And the Lord of the church alone has the right of critique and inspection and even correction in his church.

[ 7 : 30 ] And we see him here in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 as the risen Lord, the glorified Christ. And he's walking in the midst of his churches.

And he's seeing the things that go well. The things that are not going so well. He is in their midst and he remains in the midst of his church.

His piercing eyes described in Revelation 1 and 14 were like a flame of fire. And his vision is perfect vision.

He sees what's going well in the church. He sees what needs attention in the church. He knows when things are threatening the church.

He knows where Satan reigns. Chapter 2, verse 13. He had a throne there. Yeah, I believe it was in Pergamum. He knows where people are under pressure.

[ 8 : 27 ] Chapter 2, verse 9. He knows where misguided people are introducing poisonous doctrines into the church. Chapter 2, verses 15, 14, and 15.

And also verse 20 and 22. He knows where there is accommodation and compromise as we heard on last week. So we come this afternoon to Sardis.

The glorified Christ knew the local scene. And he knew the specific condition that was there. And might I add, as Jesus remains the glorified Christ in heaven, as he is there by the right hand of the Father.

And the Bible describes his role for us as a one, what I liken to, a court-appearing attorney, an advocate, one who pleads our case. But he remains there in heaven's portals for us, in glory there for us.

He does the same. And he knows what's going on in the church universal as well as in the church local. Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira.

[ 9 : 39 ] It was situated at a junction of five very important roads. In John's day, Sardis did not have the prominence that it once had as one of the richest and most powerful cities in the world.

That had come and gone. But nevertheless, commercially, Sardis was alive. Jewelry, dye, and cloth industries contributed to the city's wealth.

Sardis, because of its location, where it sit high there on a hill, it was a city that could not be captured, at least was known for that.

Yet several times in their history, because of their lack of watchfulness, the city was taken. They had been caught slumbering.

And the church in John's day was doing the same thing. Slumbering. Because of that slumber, they were ripe for rebuke.

[ 10 : 43 ] So as we look at this passage, just let me give you an overview. And I know that we're pressed for time, and I'm going to try to be as timely as I can. But I want you to hear me this

afternoon, because I believe there is a message for the church today through the church of Sardis. And it's a message that you and I need to hear. We want to look at the condition of the church. We want to then see a prescription for the church.

We want to look at the confession of Christ. But also, I want to end on the provision of Christ for his church, both then and now.

Huh? What about the condition of the church? Look at chapter 3 and the second part of verse 1, where the resurrected, glorified Christ says, I know your works.

Huh? First of all, the condition of the church as it related to their vitality. They appear to be alive, but actually, they were dead.

[11:57] Based on the inspection and the critique of the resurrected Christ, I know your works.

You have the reputation. But literally, it says you have a name of being alive, but the reality is that you're dead.

From a human vantage point, the vital signs of the church were satisfactory. Perhaps there were regular meetings, meetings with lively worship.

People may have been friendly. They may have been accepting. The fellowship may have been warm. Outsiders may have been warmly greeted. The teaching may have been stimulating.

But just as in the Pharisees' day, you and I can do all of the religious right things, but still miss the mark.

Pharisee types, religious types, they look good externally, but within, they are in bad shape. And as such, they are ineffective for the cause of Christ.

[13:02] Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 23 speak to that. Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, church folks, for you are like whitewashed tombs, who outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones in all uncleanness.

So you outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Condition of the church, dead. Appearance of life with reality, dead. In the sight of the world, maybe even in the sight of the religious world, it was a church with a reputation.

Huh? The church of Sardis was no threat to the kingdom of darkness. For the cause of Christ in the world, they were a non-factor.

There were no shows for the real game. And perhaps even they did more harm than good for the cause of Christ.

[14:17] Notice the interpretation of what it really meant to be dead, according to our Lord's words, follows in what we see in verse 2. The indications are that most of the people in the church were spiritually dead or dying.

As related to God, they were insensitive and unfeeling and unresponsive where it really counted.

You may have even called them the dead church or the dead saint society was alive and well.

It's Sardis. As related to their vitality, but also what were the conditions as it related to their activity?

We see that too, don't we? Their works were applauded by people, but in the sight of God, according to 2B, they were incomplete.

For I have not found your works complete, notice what it says, in the sight of God. It's one thing to have the applause and the approval and the affirmation of men.

It's quite another thing to have the applause and the approval and the affirmation of God. And here he says, I found your works incomplete. Their business for God was unfinished business.

[15:41] One writer notes that these were low profile kind of Christians. You know what a low profile kind of Christian is? Among their neighbors, they may be deemed as nice people.

Good Americans. They don't cause any trouble. You hardly know they're there. They don't make a ripple. They come and go, may wave across the fence.

They come and they go. We must never forget that the approval of man, however, is not the approval of God. Look at chapter 2, verse 19. From this, we get an idea of what some of their works could have been.

Again, we don't see exactly, but we see the word to the church of Thyatira, where it says in verse 19 of chapter 2, I know your works. What works?

Your love and faith and service and patient endurance that your latter works at sea the first. Those are some areas in which there could have been unfinished business for the church.

[16:49] What about their condition as related to their identity or their name and as related to their garments?

As related to their name, they were, these what you would call nominal Christians. Christians in name. And in that particular church, these nominal Christians were in the majority.

The authentic Christians were in the minority. You see that in verse 4? You still had a few names in Sardis. People who have not soiled their garments.

Huh? The majority were Christian in name only. They had a reputation. While the report as a whole was dark and bleak, there was a ray of hope because there, you might even say, was a remnant there at Sardis.

Small group of believers, a few people, people whose garments were not soiled. These seem to have been those who had kept themselves from the defilement, the pollution of society that had stained the majority there.

[18:04] These were the hearers and the doers of the word. The Lord called them worthy. And they were destined for a holy, sweet fellowship with Jesus. They were going to walk with him in white.

The downside of this is that it was only a few. Only a few. What was characteristic of the few was supposed to be the experience of the majority.

And that all were to be walking with the Lord in purity and not pollution. Revelation chapter 19 speaks about the righteousness of the saints is fine linen, clean and white.

All who name the name of Christ are to live out the reality of their identity in Christ. Positionally, before God, we stand justified, declared righteous before a holy God.

We are to live out the reality of that position as you and I walk down here. The charge for you and me today be ye holy, separate, set apart from the world and unto God.

[19:16] For I am holy, he says. They will walk with the Lord in white. Their present reality was a preview of the future that was going to be theirs.

Here was a slumbering church on the verge of death. Because these conditions existed, these people of God were ripe for review.

Question is for us today, how many of those conditions describe church in our day? Confusion abounds as it concerns what it means to really belong to Jesus, to be a Christian in our world.

Brothers and sisters, it's more than wearing a name, jewelry, language, it's engagement. It's taking on the character of Jesus.

It's taking on the mission of Jesus. It's embracing the mission. John Dennis helped us this morning as far as what does it mean to be a follower of Christ? Commitment to the person of Jesus.

[20:35] Commitment to the work of Jesus. Commitment to the authority of Jesus. That's what it means to be a follower of Christ in our world. We belong to Him.

Condition of the church, dying, slumbering, comatose. What about the prescription?

See that in verses 2 and 3. You see, the Lord just doesn't diagnose the condition of His churches. He also prescribes what's needed for health and wholeness for His church.

order that we see here is quite logical. It's like the doctor writing out a script. First one, He tears up and He gives it to His church and essentially it says, wake up.

First corrective measure was the Lord's call for them to be watchful, to be alert. It's a military word. Remember when I was in the army, one of the first things that they teach you, what they call general orders.

[21:48] I will guard everything in the limits of my post and will not leave my post until I am properly relieved. And it demands when everybody else is sleeping, you better be watchful, alert.

That's what He's calling for. Stay awake because the lack of alertness can be fatal. I think we perhaps even saw that on Friday with the accident on the red line.

The history of Sardis bore witness to it could be fatal if you're not watching. You can be caught unaware. So first word, first script, wake up, but then He tells them next to build up.

Give attention to what's on the verge of dying. Strengthen what remains and is about to die. You've got to get into a strength-building regimen.

Get those muscles that have atrophied built up again. Strengthen those things that remain. Some of you know about that. The winter is over.

[23:01] You looked in the mirror. Something sagging. That needs to be built up. Get with the regimen.

And so the word of our Lord to His church. Strengthen what remains. It's not all a lost cause. There is hope.

Huh? And then He tells them to grow up, but in order to grow up, they've got to back up. Huh? This means growing up, it's remembering and embracing what they have received in verse three. They were to remember and to keep those things and to repent. Huh? The reference likely goes back to all of those goodies that were in the salvation package that they had received when they came to faith.

Huh? There were some things that, brothers and sisters, you and I should never grow out of. And praise God for our Lord's wisdom and instituting communion where regularly we can reflect on the marvelous grace of God that brought us, those of us who were dead, He brought us to life through His own saving death.

[ 24 : 17 ] There's some things that you and I should never grow old or never grow out of, never become strange to us. God's amazing grace should continue to amaze us.

And that's why Dave and I have gotten a little giddy these days as we look at June and Rochelle coming to faith in Christ, seeing the marvelous, matchless grace of God that has a way of bringing young people miles and miles away and they find a destiny in Chicago.

people in a little church coming to help us out. But Jesus helps them out.

There's some things we should never grow out of or hold toward. to do so can cause us to depart from the faith that once and for all was delivered to the saints.

And people are so attracted to the novel, the next new thing. Ah, the marvelous, matchless grace of God that has brought salvation, Paul wrote to Titus, has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly passion, we should live soberly and righteously and gauntly in this present world.

[ 25 : 54 ] The writer of the Hebrews wrote, he said, therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from it. Listen to this, for if the message declared by angels speaking about under the old covenant was proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedient received a just retribution, how shall we escape?

We neglect so great salvation. It's a rhetorical question, isn't it? The answer is we won't escape if we do. They were to keep what they had received and heard, brothers and sisters, and so must we. Notice repentance is placed there. It's after reflection and revisiting the sacred places of their faith. And when you and I return to those sacred places of faith and grace and justification and sanctification and propitiation and all of those marvelous works of God on our behalf as we look at what we can anticipate even in glorification, when I think of all that God has done for me and then I examine my life that causes me to turn again, revisit, and often even to repent, repentance. Having gone back to the sacred ground and re-embracing the precious things of their faith, seeing with fresh vision, repentance is often the fresh order of the day.

What about the confession of Christ? Look at verse 5. Those who conquer are those who haven't been defiled. You see that there? The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

[ 27 : 43 ] I will confess him. His name, notice there's the name, the fourth time here, in this one part, in this whole of these verses, is named before my father, and again, in the sight of God before my father, that's where it really counts.

That's where there needs to be name recognition is before the God of heaven. There will be name recognition in heaven and that's where it really counts.

The security of the overcomers is in view of their names are permanently written, indelibly written in the book of life. God's record of the redeemed of the ages.

Jesus here, Jesus promises here to acknowledge or to confess the names, to acknowledge the names before the father and the angels of those who have been faithful to him on earth.

The incentive is for you and me. Listen to Jesus words in another place that echo the same sentiments. Matthew chapter 10 verses 32 and 33. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my father who is in heaven.

[ 28 : 58 ] But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my father who is in heaven. What do you want? A name before people on earth or name recognition in heaven?

The goal is that your reputation and mine as believers and as a church would be stellar in heaven that our names would be confessed.

What about the provision of Christ? Christ? In a negative sense, the church of Sardis was a dying church. We also must see this church in another light.

On the one hand, they were ripe for rebuke. On the other hand, they were ripe for revival. The Lord's critique cannot be dismissed.

Jesus was about to pull the plug. But sleeping and slumbering and dying saints and churches are ripe for revival.

[ 29 : 57 ] The Lord wanted to do the latter. Thus his word to them and to us today. Our Lord's witness in this world needs more than low profile Christians.

The needs of this world are great. Just the rash of violence in Chicago land alone. The ugly that we see.

The Lord's needs of this world and our Lord's reputation in it through those who are called by this name need faithful unashamed holy people.

People who function in the fullness of divine power. Look at verse 1. The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Who function in the fullness of the Lord's power on earth. Again, that's what's pictured in the seven fold spirit of God. He's in control.

[ 31 : 03 ] The fullness of divine power is in his hand to implement the victory of the lamb, the victory that the Lord has purchased throughout the earth. You see that?

Look at chapter 5 and verse 6, where there's a similar phrase used as it references the seven eyes of the Lord, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Again, it speaks about God, the fullness of his power sent throughout the earth through his spirit.

And so here it is, Jesus, he speaks to his church as one who has the power that she needs, and he stands ready to grant to his church all that is needed to do business in his name.

With these things in mind, the call is for the church in our day to embrace what we have received and heard. We don't need another gospel.

We need to keep the gospel that we have received and that has been handed down to us. The one who speaks in this passage has everything that's needed for his church to do business in his name.

[ 32 : 18 ] And it's up to us to remain steadfast by clinging to the faith that was once and all delivered to the saints and to not depart from it. We must not give in to the temptation to be low profile believers in this world.

It desperately needs our witness. whether than slumber you and I must be alert rather than a few making a fashion statement by being clothed in unstained garments.

All of us need the righteousness of Christ and the holiness of Christ practically as garments not to be ashamed of. The world is making fashion statements morally and otherwise.

wise. They're those who fashion wise and morality wise make statement in unashamed ways. You and I need to do the same. We have a Christ that we are unashamed of.

We must not be simply a few with white garments on. There must be many who clothe themselves with the fine linen of the saints of God.

[ 33 : 31 ] name recognition on earth must not be your focus and mine. Confession acknowledgement in heaven must be our goal.

May you and I hear clearly call expressed in this passage as well as in the song that we're about to sing now.

calling the church to arise. Ben and team won't you come hear it sing it proclaim it stand with me I'm going to pray then we're going to sing.

Lord we love you and we bless you and Lord through passages like this you call your church to to arise.

May we be found doing that in our day. May our witness Lord be not a dead or even a neutral one but may it be a vibrant and holy one in this world for your glory is our prayer in Christ's name.

[ 34 : 52 ] Amen. Ẓ Thank you.