

Revelation 3:1–6

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Date: 19 May 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Revelation 3, 1 through 6. 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.

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 the Lord.

[1 : 1 4] You may be seated. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Let me add a word of welcome to Christ Church Chicago, and also a word of thanks to Pastor Bing and the Nee family.

We are most certainly going to miss you. He's my partner in crime and helps me to keep Pastor Helm in line, and we'll miss him for the next three months, most certainly.

It is estimated that over 10 million people each year in the U.S., myself as a child included, experienced some form of what is called somnambulism.

What is that? Well, you might know it in its more common name, sleepwalking. Sleepwalking is a condition that occurs when people walk or do other activities while they're actually asleep.

These routine activities can be as benign as getting dressed, talking, eating, walking to the bathroom, or as hazardous and complex as cooking, walking outside, or even driving a motor vehicle.

[3 : 0 1] It most often occurs during deep sleep early in the night and can pose serious injury to both the wanderer and others nearby.

Sleepwalkers often have little or no memory of the incident as their consciousness has altered into a state in which memories are difficult to recall.

Although their eyes may be open, they don't react to or seem to be aware of things that should be in their field of vision.

This morning, from our text, I want to introduce you to a church that suffers from this condition.

They look like they're awake, talk like they're awake, they preach, sing, serve, act like they're awake, performing routine and sometimes complex activities with their eyes open, but they're asleep.

[4 : 1 1] This is Sardis, the sleepwalking church. Or for some of my movie fans in the room, we'll just call them Church of the Living Dead.

The call to this church, much as it is for us today, from this passage is pretty straightforward. Wake up before it's too late.

Sardis was a very wealthy city located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. It was situated on a mountain 1,500 feet above the valley floor, surrounded by three very steep perpendicular walls, or cliffs.

It had one major access road to the south that was pretty easy to defend. It was a city that was regarded as virtually impregnable to military assault.

However, Sardis became so confident in the natural defenses of their city, they felt no need to keep a diligent watch.

[5 : 26] They became lax and let their guard down, thinking there was no way the city could fall. But twice in its history, somebody came in, first the Persians, then the Greeks, using stealth like a thief in the night, they conquered the city because they were not ready.

because they were asleep. This history lesson is important because Jesus will make reference to it later as he talks to this church and admonishes them to wake up before it's too late.

This morning, we have the fifth of the seven letters to the seven churches. And by now, word has probably gotten out about these letters to the churches.

And here comes one for Sardis. The members, I can only imagine, are aware of the glorious picture of the majesty, supremacy, and authority of Jesus Christ outlined in what we now know as chapter one.

They've heard about the rebuke the Lord gives to the church at Ephesus when they abandoned their first love. The comfort the Lord has given to the church at Smyrna that is facing a time of persecution.

[6 : 53] The confrontation the Lord has with the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira, who, despite doing some good things, were admonished for compromising with the world.

However, none of these letters would raise any concern whatsoever to this church at Sardis. They would fully expect that the Lord would have nothing but good things to say about them.

After all, everyone else in town has nothing but good things to say about them. In fact, starting in verse one, the letter opens the same way.

All the other letters begin with Jesus addressing the letter to the angel of the church and then giving a description of himself. In this case, it's he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

This reference is to the Holy Spirit in all his fullness, the complete work, power, and energy of the Spirit.

[8 : 04] And it is particularly appropriate for this church in that it is the Spirit, John 6, 63, that gives life.

And this church was in desperate need of it. This dead church walking is in need of revival. And this description makes clear that revival can only come from and through Jesus himself.

now comes that great line echoed in so many of the other letters, I know your works.

Oh, man, here it comes. Here it comes. The members of the church must have been super excited. Lay it on us, Jesus. Tell us how great we are.

Imagine their surprise when now the letter takes a quick left turn.

[9 : 08] This turn marks the first of just a few points I'd like to lift from our text this morning. Consider first the rebuke. The rebuke. Jesus says here at the end of verse 1, you have the reputation for being alive but you are dead.

Normally in these letters he would move from his introduction and description of himself to a note of commendation. He would tell them something that they were doing well.

But in this letter there was no commendation. He had nothing good to say about this church. he does commend a few as we'll see later on but to the church as a whole he has nothing good or praise worthy to say.

This is actually a stunned letter. The strong message that you need to wake up. This letter is also different than previous letters in that though there are problems with other churches there is no enemy mentioned here.

this church and its issues is not Satan or the threats of government or false teachers and their corruption.

[10 : 30] The problem with this church is this church. Like perhaps many of us we tend to blame a lot of people for a lot of things.

But often times our biggest enemy is the enemy in a me. Here they have no one else to point to no one else to blame no one else to accuse for their problem.

They are rebuked because there is a problem within. men. Yes, they may have a name in the streets, a reputation for being alive, but Jesus says, I know you and you are dead.

I know the truth about you. I know the reality about who you are. I know you are a church living off of a reputation. People think you are something, but I know.

It is said to be very careful about believing your own press. I remember after being nominated for a Grammy, I was feeling pretty good about myself.

[11 : 54] That is, until I went home to visit my parents. house. I came in the house, and my mom warmly greeted me and said she was so glad I was there.

Now, could I please go out and help my dad clean out the storage shed and finish the yard? What? Do you not know that I was just nominated for a Grammy?

I'm not going out there to clean out a shed. My mom pulled me to the side and said, look, I don't care who they tell you you are out there.

Around here, you better remember that we know you. We know where you came from, and we know that you, of all people, have no reason to walk around with this attitude.

You remember the time that you got, you were in school and you got caught up with those guys riding in that car and the police had to go, okay, mom, okay. All right. yes, ma'am.

[13 : 10] Could I just please have a glass of water before I go out and help dad clean up the shed? Well, I'm sorry, we don't have any Grammy water in here. Jesus knew the church at Sardis, Jesus knows Christ Church Chicago, and Jesus knows each and every one of us here today.

Wake up before it's too late. Look, let me be clear, there is absolutely nothing wrong with having a good reputation. Churches should have good names.

You should have a good name. Proverbs tells us the importance of having a good name, but the problem here was that was all this church had, a name.

There was nothing behind it. The reputation didn't line up to the reality. They had faith that was in name only.

The church full of fake Christians, spiritual double agents who professed one thing and lived another.

[14 : 31] Yes, it does still happen today. We have worship leaders who lead worship, but they themselves never worship. Preachers who teach the gospel, but don't live by the very gospel that they teach.

Parishioners who are willing to wear a cross around their neck, but unwilling to take up their cross and follow Jesus. We used to call it playing church, all for the sake of fulfilling some outward reputation.

salvation. Yes, we are the holy, righteous, in all humility, good works church of what's happening now.

Yeah, and Jesus says, you're dead. Spiritually dead and disconnected from me. Christ church, may we collectively and individually endeavor to never have a better reputation out there than we do up there.

Please, please don't miss this, because though Jesus doesn't really linger here in verse one to elaborate, the language in the rebuke is sufficient to point out a severe warning about nominal Christianity.

[16 : 01] These are people who are walking in a false sense of salvation. They pretend to be something that they are not. We don't do this normally, but we just came through a series in the book of Matthew, and this might be a real good moment to quickly go back and review.

Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23, towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against spiritual counterfeits.

He says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my father in heaven.

And on that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many marvelous works in your name? And I will say to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Jesus is clear to all of us. You could be a smashing success with man and a horrible failure with God.

[17 : 13] you could do things that people think are so great and stand before God and actually have to introduce yourself.

I never knew you. How can I illustrate? Have you ever had this happen? My wife and I could be out somewhere and someone will come up to me and say, hey, Brother Joe, good to see you again.

How are things going? And after a brief conversation, they'll eventually walk away and my wife will say, who was that? And I'll say, I have absolutely no idea who that was.

This is Sardis. This could be any one of us. Christ's words to this dead church stand as a timeless warning to all churches and all locations throughout all time, including us.

Any church can turn at some point in its history from a vibrant witness with healthy doctrine and a loving community of saints that proclaims Jesus Christ to everyone and displays the gospel everywhere to a body that has developed spiritual necrosis and begins a decline towards spiritual death.

[18 : 36] that church might still have a reputation as being a great church but like Samson with a new haircut who did not realize that God had left him and taken away his power so also this church at Sardis did not know that their reputation had far outlasted their actual spiritual life.

Wake up before it's too late. Now it is said that anything dead should be buried. Thank God Jesus doesn't think that way or deal that way with us.

Notice here in verses two and three Jesus gives us now the remedy the remedy for getting out of this state. The remedy.

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.

Christ's remedy for bringing this dead church to life includes five imperatives. Let me move through them as quickly as I can. First Jesus issues a wake up call to this church.

[20 : 00] He shifts metaphors here. this dead church is a sleeping church and he tells them it's time to wake up. This first means to realize your true spiritual condition and open your eyes to what's going on around you in the state that you have found yourself in.

Pay attention to the signs as your body might be telling you something is wrong. A church or an individual for that matter begins to show signs of death when it is content to rest on its laurels and worship its own past.

The decline continues when it is more concerned about material things than spiritual things or when it is more enamored with what men think than what the word of God says.

waking up is also a call to be watchful, to be alert, to be on guard. This would have resonated with this church because as I mentioned earlier, twice before in the city's history, what was thought to be invincible was easily conquered because of overconfidence that made them stop being watchful.

Church, we must all be careful because it is far too easy to think that we have built unassailable spiritual fortresses when we really haven't.

[21 : 32] It can be easy to only resist the frontal assaults and miss the thieves sneaking in from the south to kill and destroy.

Church, I'm far less concerned about the times culture blatantly promotes sin than I am about the times. It just subtly blends into the background.

Wake up. He next tells them to strengthen what remains and is about to die. And then he tells them why it's about to die.

For I have not found your works complete in the sight of God. First strengthening what remains is an indication that though the spiritual condition at the church was bad, it wasn't hopeless.

Spiritually, there were things that could still be reinforced, shored up, strengthened. Jesus hadn't given up on them, nor has he given up on any of you.

[22 : 39] And though it was late, the text says it was about to die. It was not too late. Secondly, it was about to die because their works, though present, had not measured up to God's standard.

Look, the presence of works alone isn't enough because God requires a particular intent, motivation, heart, and purpose in all of our works.

What's behind what you're doing? The works should be done with a heart and a passion in a manner that showed them to be perfect, sincere, true before God.

He next tells them, hey, you need to remember, keep it, and repent. Similar to the charge that was given to the church in Ephesus, he says to remember what you have heard in the message of the gospel.

you recall what I shared with you in the very beginning, that those who sleepwalk have no memory of what they've done or why. Jesus says, go back to the truth of God's word and remember.

[23 : 52] Go back to the things that brought you to Christ in the first place and remember. Remembrance aids revival. And if you're going to be renewed, restored, and resuscitated, if you're going to wake up, he says you've got to remember what you've received and what you've heard.

And once you remember the truth, he tells them, keep it. It's another present tense imperative demanding constant activity.

Hold on to the truth. Guard the truth. Obey. Act on the truth. The final imperative, which really in a way sums up all the other four imperatives, is then simply to repent.

Here again is this call to a change of mind that results in a change of attitude and is demonstrated in a change of behavior. He again calls this church, as he has done previously in other areas, to make a U-turn.

You need to acknowledge that God's way is right and your way is wrong. You may be here today and you've never personally trusted the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 08] This is a message for you. The reality is that every one of us in this room have to answer to God for how we have lived our lives and how we have all fallen short of his glory as sinners.

There's no good thing in us like this church to commend to God without divine intervention, without God's help, without God graciously stepping in.

Good news is thankfully he's done just that. He's stepped in by his grace through his son's death on the cross.

He has provided all that is needed for your salvation. My friend today, if you just give your life to him, you can have free forgiveness, new life, and eternal hope.

Jesus says, repent, repent, repent, or else, if you don't, there will be repercussions.

[26 : 18] Repercussions. The bottom of verse three, if you will not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come against you.

This again is an allusion to the reality of the history of Sardis. When enemies snuck in unaware and overtook the city, he is saying judgment is coming.

If you don't wake up, if you don't get your guard on, if you don't remember what you've learned from scripture, if you don't repent, then the same thing is going to happen to you as a church that happened to your city, I'm going to come suddenly, quietly in the night and you are going to be unexpectedly judged, destroyed.

It's an important note here that it's estimated over 5,000 churches close their doors every year while only 1,000 are planted.

Wake up before it's too late. Then in the midst of all this stern admonishment comes a ray of hope.

[27 : 38] There is still in the midst of this sleeping church a remnant, we'll call them, a remnant. Verse 4, there are a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments and they walk with me in white for they are worthy.

Jesus is saying though this church may be in a coma, I still detect brain activity. Though this church is unconscious, I still detect a pulse and as long as there is a pulse, there is still hope for revival of the whole body.

Lord, may we be counted in that number that have kept their garments clean. Those that continue to pursue a relationship with Christ, those that remain committed to the gospel and stand firmly on the word of God, pure and holy, tried and true.

Look, this remnant was not worthy because of anything they did and neither are we. They only get to wear white robes because of the red blood of Jesus Christ and their faith and trust in him.

Here it is. You've done this now and there is a reward. There's a reward. Verse five, the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

[29 : 21] I will confess his name before my father and before his angels to the one, to the one who conquers, who is victorious, who prevails, who overcomes, who wakes up.

You too then can wear white after Labor Day just like this remnant. Pastor Joe, how can I overcome?

Let me help you. Let me help you. To overcome, you don't have to be in some elite group. You don't have to be some type of special forces or seal team six Christian.

first John five, four says for everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

An overcomer is who you are by virtue of your faith in Jesus Christ. Lord, help. Now, Jesus says, not only do you get to wear right robes, clothed in my righteousness, your salvation is eternally secure because I will never, ever, ever, ever erase your name from the book of life.

[30 : 51] And Doug, because sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, you won't have to introduce yourself in heaven because I know your name and I will declare it to my father and the angels that are in heaven.

Yes, this is the promise, church. May we all be able to sing together like that old spiritual, I got a robe, you got a robe, all God's children got a robe.

When I get to heaven, gonna put on my robe, I'm gonna shout all over God's heaven. One day, Brother Stephan, when it's all over, I'm gonna put on my robe, tell the story, how I made it over.

Please, please, please, hear what the spirit is saying to the church today.

And if you find yourself getting sleepy, if through the mirror of today's text, you've been able to self-diagnose yourself with somnambulism, with drowsy faith, with sleepwalking faith, with comatose faith, I encourage you to remember where you came from.

[32 : 25] Hold on hold on to the truth, repent, and wake up before it's too late.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness and your mercy toward us. Thank you, God, for another chance, another opportunity to get it right, and to wake up before it's too late.

stir up again the gift that is in us, that way we may be alert and ready for what is coming.

Don't let us sleepwalk our way through our Christianity, through our worship, but let it come alive again in us, so that we may one day put on that robe, tell the story, walk with you, how we made it over.

Father, we thank you, we love you, we praise your name. It's in your son's name we pray and give thanks. Amen. Let's pray.