

Wake Up!

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[0 : 00] Well, thanks for coming back in and taking a seat. For those who are already seated, you might like to turn back in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 3. Revelation chapter 3, last book of the Bible.

Why don't I pray for us again before we get into it? Let's pray. Father, thank you so much again for your word and for your spirit. And so we pray that by your spirit, you would help us to understand your word.

And again, that you would give us hearts to live in light of it. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I'm assuming most of you have heard about the kids group, The Wiggles.

Has everyone heard about The Wiggles? They're a kids group that does kids songs. This is the original band. They've changed over time. Our kids enjoyed them when they were little.

And if you've ever had to babysit little kids, they're a lifesaver. But one of the most well-known songs by The Wiggles is Wake Up Jeff. Wake up Jeff.

[1 : 07] Everybody's wiggling. Wake up Jeff. We really need you. Wake up Jeff. You're missing all the fun now. Wake up Jeff. Before the day's through. It's pretty catchy, isn't it?

Wake up Jeff. Now, what's The Wiggles got to do with Revelation, which is the question Naomi asked at the beginning of the service? Well, today, Jesus says, Not wake up Jeff, but wake up Sardis.

And you see it there in verse 2. He says, Wake up. And again, in verse 3, With the warning, If they don't, wake up. The connection is today, Jesus says, Wake up Sardis.

Because it seems they had grown spiritually lethargic to the point of falling asleep on the job of being Christians. In fact, their Christianity had gone into such deep hibernation that Jesus says they were a church in name only and actually dead inwardly.

So at point 1 on the outline and verse 1 in your Bibles, he says, To the angel of the church in Sardis write, These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

[2 : 22] Before we get to the next bit, just a reminder that the seven stars, we heard from chapter 1, represent the seven angels of the seven churches. And seven is a number in Revelation that means complete or full.

So all the messengers of all the churches, really. But again, it's hard to know whether the word angel refers to an heavenly being, as it does in the rest of the book of Revelation, or to a messenger.

Because the word angel can also mean messenger in the New Testament. And perhaps that makes a bit more sense in verse 1, to the messenger of the church in Sardis, the one who will read it aloud to that particular church.

Either way, as I said, the number seven represents fullness or completeness. He holds all his angels, all his messengers, in his hand. And the seven spirits refers to the complete spirit.

And who is the complete spirit? Well, the Holy Spirit. He holds the Holy Spirit in his hand, ready to send to their aid, should they wake up and ask for help.

[3 : 28] And they need to, because he goes on to say in verse 1, in your Bibles, I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

It seems their deeds have given them a reputation of being spiritually alive in the eyes of the world. Perhaps like some churches today, with numerous members, amazing music, not that ours isn't, by the way, a wonderful website, not that ours isn't, actually, no, it's not very good, but even attracting celebrities.

They seem to be spiritually alive on the outside, but Jesus says they're actually spiritually dead on the inside. In verse 2, he'll actually say that their deeds are unfinished before God.

They've fallen asleep and stopped doing the deeds that mattered to God. Instead, they're just kind of going through the motions, or just for show.

In fact, the word reputation in verse 1 is literally the word name. They have a name for being alive when they're actually dead. Here is nominal Christianity.

[4 : 44] A Christianity in name only. That's what nominal means. They call themselves Christians in name, but they don't live as genuine Christians in life.

They look like Christians on the outside, but don't really believe on the inside. How does this happen to Sardis? Well, it seems Sardis was a comfortable place to live.

It was a wealthy city. Gold was found there, and in fact, apparently it was the first ancient city to mint gold and silver coins, like this gold coin on the screen from Sardis.

Plus, it sat on the junction of five roads, so it got lots of money from travellers passing by. Here is a picture of the shop, so the dirt road at the bottom of the screen is where the travellers would walk past the marketplace, and each little stone alcove would have had a different business or a different shop to buy things at.

And so they got wealthy from trade. It was also a newly renovated city. In 17 AD, the whole city was destroyed by an earthquake, and then Emperor Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, rebuilt it at great cost to Rome.

[6 : 02] And so it had that kind of new car smell. You know that new car smell? Oh, it smells so good. That new house look to it. It even came with its own acro-arena.

It had a gym and a pool. You can see in the background of the slide, here it is on the front picture of the gymnasium in the pool, and if you go inside, that sunken bit where the grass is, there's your 50-metre swimming pool to do laps in.

And so it was wealthy. It was renovated. It had all the mod cons, like a gym and a pool. It was a comfortable place to live. And what's more, there's no mention in this particular letter of the church facing persecution.

So many of the other churches, references to persecution, but there's no reference to persecution here. And so even for Christians, it seems to have been a comfortable place to live.

But the danger with comfort is that it can lead us to becoming complacent. You know, we can enjoy our comfort so much so that we forget or fall asleep on Christ.

[7 : 12] I mean, do we tend to forget Christ when life is bad or when life is good? When it's good, isn't it? And when life is good and comfortable, nothing forces us to cry out to God in prayer.

Nothing forces us to cling to his promises of a better life to come because this life is so good. You see, comfort can make us complacent with Christ.

So comfort to complacent. And if you stay too complacent for too long, it can lead you to end up walking away from Christ with your heart. Just end up going through the motions, becoming a church or a Christian name only, but dead inwardly.

That's the trajectory. Comfort, complacent, dead spiritually. My in-laws live in a comfortable part of the world called Geringong. It's a beachside town on the south coast of New South Wales.

It has fabulous views, great spots to surf and the like. It's much like the beachside town of Apollo Bay where I just recently went. Only Geringong is much warmer. And it was freezing down there.

[8 : 24] But some years ago, I remember my father-in-law telling me about an outreach program their church in Geringong was running to help people hear about Jesus and have the certain hope of heaven by believing in him.

But they were finding it hard to get people to help, you know, man the store, cook some food to give out or hand out leaflets, talk to people, that sort of thing. And he was speaking to one particular church member and the church member said this.

They said, why do we need to worry about getting to heaven when we already live in paradise?

That's what they said. They were so comfortable in their town, they'd become complacent with Christ and his call to make disciples.

And if they continued like that, if they continued to let their comfort make them complacent, then they could end up becoming a Christian in name only and becoming spiritually dead inwardly.

I don't think they were at that point, but that's the danger. That's how it happens. Of course, we can fall into the same trap of complacency too, can't we? Even those who are actually spiritually alive as Christians, we can still become complacent.

[9 : 37] For a moment, I found myself doing that on holidays. I was enjoying my comfortable holiday and went some time without thinking about Christ when I realized I couldn't believe what had just happened.

We were still saying grace at dinner time, but I realized looking back, it was just going through the motions. It wasn't heartfelt. I'd let the comfort of a holiday make me complacent towards Christ. I kind of fell asleep on Christ, as it were. Do we do that during the week? Go to church on Sundays and then forget about him all the other days?

Are we in danger of becoming sleepy or complacent towards Christ? Or perhaps on the flip side, rather than kind of drifting into complacency, we deliberately choose comfort over Christ.

You know, staying warm in bed on a cold Sunday morning is much more comfortable than coming to church. I mean, it just is, isn't it? Or rejecting the Bible's teaching on certain topics makes life more comfortable with our non-Christian friends and family or work colleagues.

[10 : 48] Or ignoring that sin in our lives is much more comfortable than facing up to it and asking for God's help to deal with it. Or not even, you know, not saying grace at a restaurant is more comfortable than standing out as different and have people whisper behind your back.

Are we in danger of deliberately choosing comfort over Christ? Whether it's being complacent and sleepy towards Christ or whether it's deliberately choosing comfort over Christ, both of them can lead us to becoming Christians in name only, to becoming dead inwardly.

And that's what had happened to Sardis, certainly. They'd become dead spiritually. And so Jesus says, wake up, Sardis, point two, verse two.

Wake up, strengthen what remains and is about to die. For I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.

Now, dead people can't usually wake up, can they? But here it seems there's still hope for this church. It seems Jesus has them on life support, so to speak.

[12 : 06] Because Jesus says to them, wake up and strengthen. which implies they can do this. In fact, the main command here is actually to strengthen what remains.

What remains? Well, I take it they are the deeds that are unfinished before God in the rest of the verse. The deeds they started off doing before they became complacent and sleepy.

What are these deeds? deeds? Well, when Jesus mentioned the same word deeds last week in chapter two, verse 19, he unpacked them with some examples like love, faith, service, perseverance.

They started off doing these things but didn't finish them. Or perhaps they no longer did them genuinely. It was all now just for show.

And so they're to wake up and strengthen the remnants of these deeds. To trust in Christ genuinely. To love others sincerely.

[13 : 08] To serve selflessly. And to persevere ardently. Because if they don't, then even the bits of these deeds that remain will die out completely, he says.

Have you ever heard the saying, if you don't use it, you lose it? Yeah. The more we use or practice love, faith, service, perseverance, the stronger it becomes.

It's why the growing persecution of Christians in Australia, there's actually a good part to it, or about it. I don't know if you realise this. Because persecution actually stops us from being too comfortable and complacent, doesn't it?

It actually forces us to choose whether we will be known as a Christian or not, whether we'll stand up for Christ or not. It forces us, in other words, to practice our faith in Christ, our perseverance in Christ.

And the more we practice it, in turn, the stronger it becomes. But on the other hand, again, if you don't use it, you lose it.

[14 : 19] And that's what Sardis is in danger of happening there. They are to wake up and strengthen what remains, otherwise that too will die out completely.

And perhaps they'll no longer even call themselves Christians in name. They'll walk away from Christ thoroughly. And so they'll remain spiritually dead forever.

In other words, their eternity is at stake. And it's so serious that Jesus spends the rest of this mini-letter trying to help them wake up and strengthen. Point three, verse three.

He says, remember, therefore, what you have received and heard. Hold it fast and repent. The word therefore, in verse three, really marks a shift in the passage.

And I think perhaps the new paragraph should start here. You see, they desperately need to wake up and strengthen. Therefore, here's some help to do it, says Jesus.

[15 : 21] And first, he says, remember what you've received and heard. And what have they received and heard? Well, it's the gospel, isn't it? The good news of Jesus.

The good news of Jesus is the king who died for our sin to free us from judgment for life with him. That's what they're to remember.

For when we remember all that Christ has done for us, doesn't it motivate us, move us to live for him? Isn't that how it works? Isn't that being my experience?

I mean, what other king or leader would die for us? At the moment, leaders seem only to tax us more. And all the news about ATO tax returns plummeting. Or they cancel the Commonwealth Games on us too soon.

What other religion offers us hope and help through hardships in life? Our family to belong to, plus the guarantee of eternity in true paradise, which would be a lot better than Apollo Bay.

[16 : 27] They're to remember this gospel, verse three, hold it fast or keep it and repent of not living in light of it, not living with Jesus as their king, which is what the gospel says.

So if you want help to wake up from spiritual sleepiness, then remember the gospel, that this good news really is good news, that Jesus really is worth following, even if it causes us to be uncomfortable.

That's the carrot, remember the gospel, next comes the stick, as it were, heed the warning. The rest of verse three. He says, but if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what time I come to or literally against you.

This picture of a thief coming at an unexpected time is a picture that Jesus used before for his disciples. He used it like in Matthew's gospel to talk about his return to judge.

Notice the same word awake is there, only this time it's stay awake rather than wake up, because you don't know what day the Lord is coming, is returning. And when he returns, he will judge the world and put all things right.

[17 : 43] But that also means judgment for those who have walked away from Christ. And so here is the warning. Jesus is coming like a thief in the night, and so wake up, be ready.

city. And this should have especially rung true for Sardis because something like this had already happened in their history, actually. You see, the city had a lower level with the shops and the gym and pool that I just showed you, but it also had an upper level, a citadel or acropolis, which is the name given to an upper level of a city built on a mountaintop.

It's kind of like the keep of the castle where people could retreat to, and they had more safety because of the elevation. In fact, they even built brick walls on top of the mountain. Here's a closer look.

Someone from this morning actually told me, yep, I've been there. That's exactly what it's like.

They've got these walls, but the problem is these walls made them so comfortable, no one stayed awake to keep watch.

And so in 549 BC, King Cyrus sent one soldier up the wall like a thief in the night, climbed over, opened the gates, and he captured the city like that.

[19 : 01] And to make things worse, Sardis still didn't wake up because it happened again, this time in 216 BC by Antiochus the Great. Sardis had a history of not waking up or staying awake, which meant capture by those who came like a thief in the night.

This picture should have rung true for them. It should have hit home. Jesus says, wake up, Sardis, and stay awake, otherwise I will come like a thief in the night.

Not to capture, but to judge. But Jesus doesn't end on the warning, the stick negative if you like, but on the positive with three promises.

Firstly, verse 4 and 5. He says, yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me dressed in white, for they are worthy.

The one who is victorious, who wakes up, will like them, be dressed in white too. Here, soiled clothes, doesn't mean they've spilt their coffee down the front of them or something like that.

[20 : 10] It's a metaphor, right? There are some, just a few in Sardis, who have not contaminated themselves, who have not become complacent and sleepy towards Christ, who have not become dead spiritually.

And they will walk with Christ and be dressed in white. In Revelation, white stands for purity, and since heaven is pure, these are the clothes you need to enter.

Kind of like how some restaurants have a dress code, you know, they say you've got to wear a collared shirt or something like that to enter. Well, heaven has a dress code, as it were, white clothes.

In fact, it's interesting that white clothes is exactly what Jesus was seen in when he was transferred, when the disciples saw his true nature on the mountain that day.

Only for us, they're made white by his blood. Later on in Revelation chapter 7, those who persevere through the tribulation, through the trials of life, they have washed their robes and made them white, and not in omo or coal power, but in the blood of the land, the blood of Christ.

[21 : 22] And so those who've continued to genuinely trust in Christ, those who are Christian inwardly and not just in name only, the blood of Christ will give them white robes to enter heaven.

The great news here though is there's still time for those others insiders who have soiled their clothes to wash them white. There's still time for those who are spiritually dead to become spiritually alive.

There's still time for those who are Christian in name only to become Christian inwardly. For Jesus says in the verse 5, the one who is victorious, the one who wakes up, will like these faithful few also be dressed in white.

The blood of Christ will wash them clean. They too will enter heaven to enjoy paradise with Christ, not just for a little while, but forever.

You see the rest of verse 5? He says, and I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life. In other words, their name will always be in the book of life, which naturally means you're always going to have life.

[22 : 41] This is eternal life on view, isn't it? Forever. And in case that's still not enough to help us and motivate us to stay awake with Christ or for these people to wake up, well, Jesus says one more promise in the rest of verse 5.

He says, and I will acknowledge that name before my father and his angels. Again, Jesus said something similar in Matthew's gospel.

He said, whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my father in heaven.

What a great privilege. I mean, it's always nice to be acknowledged by others, isn't it? You know, when people see you and greet you and even remember your name, you know, it's nice, isn't it?

In fact, I forgot someone's name over the morning too. It was terrible. Or it's nice when your boss acknowledges your job and says, well done, you've been doing a great job lately. Or when your kids or grandkids or your nieces and nephews acknowledge you with pride, saying, this is my auntie or uncle, this is my grandpa and grandma.

You know, you're quite chuffed. I was still waiting with my kids, but waiting for that to happen. can you imagine? It's quite a nice thing. But how much more so being acknowledged by King Jesus himself.

[24 : 05] And so can you imagine standing before the awesome, somewhat terrifying throne of God on Judgment Day with all humanity and Christ the King is on his throne and he points down at you and says, this is Crystal, my sister.

Imagine what a great feeling and great honour that would be. This is Raphael, my brother. Can you imagine being acknowledged by Christ before God on that day?

I think Jesus gives this promise about their name at the end because it contrasts with their name at the beginning. Remember back in verse 1, they have a name or reputation for being alive before the world's eyes but Jesus says if they wake up they'll have a name before God's eyes.

And which would you rather? Be acknowledged by the world in its own eyes for a moment of honour or being acknowledged by Christ in God's eyes for an eternity of sharing in Christ's honour? It's chalk and cheese isn't it? And so if you're here this morning and you might call yourself a Christian but you don't really believe all this Jesus stuff or you don't really want to take Christianity too seriously you don't really want to make it an all of life thing just an occasional Sunday thing then the application is wake up strengthen what remains really believe in Jesus put your trust in him wholeheartedly because a Christian in name only is no Christian at all rather a Christian is one who believes in Jesus genuinely so much so that they seek to live for him in all of life now I take it most of us here in this room if not all of us are genuine Christians we do believe in

[26 : 14] Jesus and so the application for us is to stay awake we're not to become complacent or sleepy to some sins in our lives because it's more comfortable than dealing with them because again the more complacent we become the more in danger we are of being a Christian in name only and we're not to fall asleep on to some things we ought to do because it's more comfortable than trying to do them it's just too hard work to love that person so it's more comfortable not to rather we're to stay awake seeking not to sin but continuing to live for him even when it's uncomfortable it's not always easy so remember the gospel you've received and heard heed the warning that Jesus will return at a time you don't expect and hear the promises of a white robe to enter heaven of life forever in a place better than Apollo Bay and of having Christ proudly say before his father this is my brother my sister verse 6 whoever has ears let them hear this morning what the spirit says to this church let's pray gracious father help us we pray not to be sleepy complacent

Christians in danger of becoming Christians in name only but help us to be genuine Christians inwardly who stay awake to Christ and live for him in all of life may the spirit whom he holds in his hand help us to do this we pray in Jesus name amen