

No Complacency

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[0 : 00] Now we've come to the fifth of the seven churches, the letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor. We've come to the church in Sardis.

We're going to read that smaller section, smaller than most in the vision that Jonah was given of these churches. So we're going to read Revelation 3, verses 1 to 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.

[1 : 06] 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.

May God bless that reading from his holy word. This morning we were thinking of the church in Thyatira, the command very much, no compromise.

This evening we look at the church in Sardis, and the command really to no complacency. That complacency of the church, in other words, the self-satisfied mindset that thinks we're doing okay, we're doing fine, we don't need to go that second mile, we don't need to do anything beyond what we're doing in the minimum.

The complacency that certainly we'll see was the case in Sardis. And then we're going to read the commands that Jesus gave to that church to wake up and to strengthen what remained there of that church's witness, limited though the witness was there, and then the comfort that Jesus gave to the few there who were remaining worthy and honouring their Saviour.

[2 : 41] So the command, no complacency. Nobody likes words of censure. Nobody likes to be censured. But, you know, there are times when censure, reprimand, when you're reprimanded for something that you've done wrong, these words are necessary.

You know, when words are given to you to make right what has been wrong in your life, in my life, and yes, we accept these words of censure in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And for the city there, the church in the city of Sardis, that's what we read certainly in the first part of that letter to that church.

These were words of censure, but words from the word, for the word of the Lord Jesus. And Jesus giving these words of censure in order that that church be restored, that church come to its senses and do the work that God had given them to do and to testify to the Lord Jesus there in that city.

And the words that we read there, these were strong words, strong words of reprimand. Because the church there was being so complacent. There was spiritual complacency.

[4 : 02] There was religious complacency. That complacency that was so saturated in the church there. The church that, you know, thought it was a lie. Thought it was doing well.

Thought it was doing what it was meant to do. You know, a church that held the right doctrines. It ticked the right boxes when it came to belief and practice. And yet, as we read there in these opening words, it was a church that Jesus deemed to be spiritually dead.

Spiritually dead in its commitment to its Lord and Saviour. And so there in Sardis, or to the church in Sardis, Jesus gives this very solemn verdict to a church that appeared alive, but was dead.

Dead in its spiritual decline. And, you know, we've got to be warned. And warned through this word of the Lord Jesus.

Be warned. Because, you know, spiritual complacency, it's such a dangerous condition in any church. You know, when you think you're doing right. You think everything's going fine.

[5 : 12] You know, when you think that, oh, we're just doing all that God's given us to do. And yet, all along, our hearts can be so dead. Dead to what truly matters.

Dead to when we should be alive. Being proactive, active in the work of the kingdom. And the evidence, then, of spiritual decay.

Surely when you think less of the Lord Jesus Christ, more of self. Even thinking less of the Lord Jesus, and more in terms of externals in worship. When we forget whom we serve and whom we worship.

The question is, do you think more of the Lord Jesus than you do even of yourself? You know, we can so easily go even through the motions of worship.

And yet, our hearts can be so far from our Lord and Savior. You know, when Paul wrote to Timothy, when Paul spoke of that very condition. 2 Timothy 3, 5.

[6 : 12] When Paul, if you like, spoke of false religions. And shame, having the appearance of godliness. But denying its power. And so, we're going to look at what's been said to this church in Sardis.

As we've been doing all along, we need to know a little bit about the place where the vision was given. Because the context is important to understand some of the more difficult lines in these words.

So we have to know a little bit about the city. that certainly helps to explain some of the more relatively obscure parts of this letter. Another inland city, just like Thyatira.

A city that certainly had a splendid past. It was a very rich city. A river that ran through the city. Gold had been found in that river.

One of the kings of that city of times past was a man called Croesus. You've heard the expression as rich as Croesus. And certainly, that city had very much a reputation for being rich.

[7 : 20] But it was a richness, as it like, of the past. It was a city that, in some ways, looked back on its past without looking to its present or future.

An earthquake had destroyed that city, and it's testified in AD 17, certainly maybe 70, 80 years before this letter was written.

And so it was a city that, you know, looked back on a golden era, but had never really recaptured that greatness. You know what it's like when you look back and sort of bask in a golden era that really hasn't come to the present.

And, well, it was a city that people were very proud of its past. The city that was built on a mountain. And a very strong fortress that protected it.

And there was a saying, you know, to capture the Acropolis of Sardis. There was a saying that said, you know, it means that you're impregnable. You know, you can't be taken, can't be captured.

[8 : 26] And yet, the city had been captured. Five times the city had been conquered in what appeared to be a city that couldn't be captured. And certainly, on at least two occasions, that city had been captured through lack of vigilance.

So, a city that looked back on its past. A city that was very proud of itself. A city that thought of itself as great. And yet, there were so many weaknesses in that city.

And a city, too, that, like the other cities, very much a pagan city. The various pagan cults that existed in that city. But, in that city, it was a church.

A Christian church. And yet, and yet, despite the fact that it was there as a church in Sardis, it seemed that there was no record of persecution of that church there.

And so, you know, there we have it. A city that looks back at its past reputation, reputation, reputation for greatness. A city that boasted that it couldn't be conquered and yet had been conquered through lack of vigilance.

[9 : 40] A city that had many pagan cults, but there was no record at that time of any opposition from the church to these cults. These three things are important when we seek to understand what this letter is saying to the church, because they point to the complacency of that church.

And Jesus knows. He knows that church. I know your works, he says there in verse 1. Well, what did Jesus know about that church in Sardis? He said, you've got a reputation.

You've got a reputation for being alive, but you're dead. And you see the link between the reputation of the city of Sardis and the reputation of the church in Sardis.

That city, remember, that it basked in its reputation for greatness, but the reality was really quite different. And Jesus is, as we said, connecting the decline of the city of Sardis with the decline of the church in Sardis.

And it seems very much a rapid decline. This church probably founded maybe 60 years before this letter was given. And there's very much a rapid decline. And it's been called dead because it doesn't seem to be active in anything that would indicate that the church was alive.

[11 : 00] Because there wasn't the evidence of love and faith and service and perseverance that we saw even this morning in the church in Thyatira. So this is a church that's existing in the midst of a very much a pagan environment.

And that was the case. It should have been seen to be a persevering church. A church even standing against these pagan cults.

But there didn't seem to be any persecution because there didn't seem to be any perseverance against false religion. There was no reaching out in love to those around.

There was no service done in Christ's name. No evidence of faith exercising the word of God. And so very much it seems this was a church that existed in name only.

It didn't seem to be the evidence of a church that was alive. A church that exhibited the fruits of the Spirit. It didn't seem to be the costly grace of discipleship.

[12 : 06] It didn't seem to be that honouring the Lord Jesus when he said follow me. Instead of following Jesus it seemed they were turning their backs on him. Yes they thought they were all right.

Yes they thought even that they even had a good reputation in the city. The complacency setting and why threaten why threaten their reputation by rocking the boat and you know getting their hands dirty and challenging these pagan practices.

You know there's a real danger that any church any church can become complacent. Any church can become so self-satisfied thinking you know like the fortress in Sardis that we're going to still be there we're still going to be here in 15, 20, 30 years time.

And you know as Bonhoeffer mentioned cheap grace this sort of attitude that you know says we're fine we're doing all right we don't need to be constant in our witness and our service for the Lord.

And of course that's a disaster. Your security is found not in Christ but in the world. You know a church can become so much a social institution a social organisation but not having that dynamism that power of the spirit within to reach out to others because as a church we're commanded to live for Christ to live in Christ to live for Christ to live with Christ the cross of Christ has to be central to any church and you know instead it can be the case so easy easily it happens when we can allow cheap grace just going through the motions rather than exhibiting that costly grace of discipleship that certainly that seemed to be absent in the church there in Sardis and that complacency that that enemy within it's that attitude that God condemns and condemned in Scripture you read in the Old Testament when God was looking at the people the people in all their affluence and all their prosperity people there in Jerusalem and you read in one of the smaller books the book of Zephaniah

[14 : 32] Zephaniah 1.12 where God says at that time I'll search Jerusalem with lamps and I will punish the men who are complacent those who say in their hearts the Lord will not do good nor will he do ill you see the people at that time at the time of Zephaniah the Old Testament they weren't doing anything in the Lord's service they were complacent they were saying you know well it doesn't really matter it doesn't really matter what we do with this sort of idea of being a practical atheist you know treating God as just like any of the other gods when we should be elevating our Lord and Saviour to that status of the one who alone is to be obeyed and served and you know with all these pagan temples in Sardis the church really was saying well probably just like any other of these these pagan gods the church wasn't showing the difference the true difference that following the Lord Jesus makes in a in a person's life and that's a warning the complacency that sets in is a warning to any church that claims to follow the Lord Jesus and even seeks to rest in its reputation but reputation counts for nothing unless Jesus is at the centre unless you're alive in the Lord Jesus

Christ unless the living word of God drives you to service and drives you to yes to count the cost but even in counting that cost to follow the Lord Jesus who gave himself for you in fullness in that joy in serving the Lord that Jesus showed in his giving of himself for you there was no no complacency in Jesus service and so Jesus has a word to say to any church any church that you know rests in its reputation even on a of a reputation of times past no let's not rest in any reputation because resting in a previous reputation if you like shows that there's very little life within but Jesus will not give up if you like in giving his word even to a church that might seem to be dead as we see here in the command that Jesus gives to the church where Jesus says in that command wake up verse 2 wake up he's saying to the church there you know you're sleeping you know in all the midst of that rampant secularism that rampant paganism wake up wake up as we said the place the city of Sardis that had that strong fortress a fortress that had been overcome because of lack of vigilance and you can see that as we said the connection

Jesus said to that church don't be like these guards that were asleep when the city was attacked and saying to the church today don't be like those who are sleeping when the evil one seeks to disrupt and damage the cause of the Lord Jesus don't be like those who drop their guard and become complacent because the enemy of our souls can so quickly steal in and cause havoc with your faith so Jesus is saying then is saying now he's saying wake up remember when Jesus was on earth remember his last days before his crucifixion and Jesus would often use these words to his disciples telling them to keep watch to remain awake watch and pray Jesus saying to his disciples so that you won't fall into temptation these same words are given to the Lord's people today watch and pray so that you won't fall into that temptation of complacency watch and pray stay awake because you know what it's like you know what it's like when you're drowsy you know when you're tired and your mind isn't as alert as it ought to be and it's at these times that you make silly mistakes how much more in your life as a

Christian as a believer you know when you're not being alert to that danger all around when you're not being as vigilant as you should be when you're just praying now and again when you're not being constant in prayer when you're not constantly walking with a saviour that so often at these times when you drop your guard when mistakes happen when you allow sin into your life so just thinking this morning and there's so many compromises we can make when we drop our guard against the evil one when temptation is given into and at these times that your effectiveness as a Christian is weak and when there are ineffective Christians there's an ineffective church and a loving saviour knows he knows these times when you're spiritually drowsy and so as Jesus knew of that church there in Sardis and their spiritual sleepiness he gives commands and listen to these commands we've listened to the first one wake up but then he says in the same breath strengthen what remains strengthen what remains and is about to die

Jesus has spoken about that church as a dead church but there are still signs of life because not everyone in that church is existing in a complacency there are some in that church who are near spiritual death but they're promised that they can be restored that the dry bones can live they can be restored to that spiritual fitness and fullness and so Jesus gives that command strengthen the things that remain you're not yet fully dead there are believers that aren't completely as it were dead like so many others in that church in Sardis and when Jesus says strengthen these things that remain there's no doubt that there were those people in that church who were certainly doing some kind of good work some kind of work for the cause of the gospel but as we read there in the passage in verse 2 it was work that was incomplete it says I haven't found your works complete in the sight of God and our minds think back to that time of the prophet Haggai you know when the exiles had returned from

[21 : 27] Babylon and they were to build the temple they were to you know get their priorities correct they were to focus on worship of God first and foremost and the temple's foundations had been laid but then they stopped they stopped building the temple they said at the time it wasn't right for the Lord's house to be fully built because all the time they were building their own luxurious homes they were neglecting the priorities that God had given them and of course that spiritual complacency it's a kind of complacency that has to be resisted even today and we thank God even as we noticed this morning as we saw this morning on the screens that complacency is being resisted the healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland that's not complacency that's engaging with the environment around us as we noticed in that video that the call to call upon

God in prayer and mission and communicating the message of the gospel in its 21st century context whether it's in Livingston whether it's in Skye whether it's in the highlands the islands the lowlands the central belt the gospel has to be proclaimed in the context of the place where God sends you there's an accompanying booklet to that vision of the healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland the video is online let's read one thing that's written in that booklet we want to raise the evangelistic temperature across the whole denomination so that every one of us becomes a little more intentional in sharing the good news my time here in Livingston almost comes to an end I pray that you as a congregation that you'll continue to respond in faithfulness to that call of God to wake up and strengthen what remains strengthen your gospel intentionality be intentional intending to proclaim the good news to your friends to your neighbours to those around you strengthen your faith in the

Lord strengthen that faith that moves mountains strengthen your zeal for the Lord in this small corner wake up strengthen strengthen what remains and then further commands remember obey and repent remember then what you received and heard keep it and repent see the commands there remember bring to mind what in the first instance of the people in Sardis remember what you heard first when you received the gospel remember what these faithful missionaries brought to you even in their coming to you to bring the good news of salvation bring to mind what you heard when you heard first remember what you heard of the love of the Lord Jesus for sinners remember what you heard about the price that Jesus paid for you on the cross remember what you heard of the forgiveness of sins for all who put their trust in the

Lord Jesus and repent of their sins remember and in that classic Old Testament sense of the word remember don't just bring it to mind but bring it to mind with a view to action act upon that remembering show forth the love of the Lord Jesus to others and word and witness practice it practice the word of truth live it out serve the one who came in serving his father and giving of himself for you serve and persevere and serve the one who came in in persevering love serve the Lord Jesus who persevered even to the cross when you remember these things that you first heard when you came to know the Lord Jesus as your saviour then get rid of any kind of half-hearted complacency and return to your first love that's the cure for the spiritual complacency there in

Sardis and that's the cure for any sickness of complacency remember remember the Lord remember your saviour remember what God has done for you in Christ and obey and repent act upon that remembering and repent of your sins as each one of us you have to repent of our sins of complacency God's word reassures us that when you do repent of your sins when you repent you are forgiven forgiven that sure promise of forgiveness for your sins if you confess our sins as John tells us he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness what if there's no repentance what if things just remain as they are and the church just slumbers from one week to the next and there's no remembering and there's no obeying and there's no repenting what did

[27 : 06] Jesus say to the church there in Sardis he said that he'd come like a thief a thief to the church and Jesus of course used that expression before Jesus speaks of that time when he'll come again when he'll come to earth that second time and he'll come as a thief in the night we read that in Matthew 24 and the words accompanying Jesus promised to come as a thief in the night the words that accompany that telling that you must be ready you must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour and you don't expect him and as Paul told the church in Thessalonica you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night but when Jesus speaks here of if you won't wake up I'll come like a thief he's not as much speaking of a second coming but he's speaking of a coming in judgment you see

Jesus is again I think coming back to what happened in Sargis the sleeping guards sleeping when they ought to have been awake and the city taken in the night time people weren't expecting an assault in the city Jesus saying he's going to come he's going to punish the church when they least expect it just as when the city was captured when people were sleeping when they ought to have been awake and it's got to be a warning it's got to be a warning to any church where complacency sets in because we can so easily sleepwalk into judgment and let's pray that Scotland itself yes the church in Scotland even the land of Scotland that we wake up that the slumbering churches of our land that we'll wake up and strengthen what remains because pray that

Lord Jesus won't come in a time of judgment because Christ's judgment's a terrible thing but we don't close with these words of again of warning we close with words of comfort as we read there from verse 4 because even though Sardis was a church that was in a desperate condition all wasn't lost there because we're told in verse 4 there were a few people a few people who hadn't soiled their clothes and Jesus promises them as he promises all who remain faithful to him that they'll walk with him as we're told dressed in white that they'll know eternal security in him and you know even this picture of being dressed in white this word picture of you might say purity you know the expression of white in the context of scripture this expression of purity someone who's clothed with

Christ clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness that's what a person is like when he truly is of the Lord and following the Lord and Saviour clothed clothed with Christ's righteousness and clothed with Christ's righteousness meaning you've got that eternal security in the Lord Jesus you ask as it were you are wearing the purity of Christ be encouraged with that that you who walk with Jesus now you've got that promise of an eternal walk with your Saviour you're clothed with Christ's righteousness now the purity of Christ's righteousness you'll have that righteousness for all eternity all because of what Jesus did for you on the cross and that the implication of what Jesus did for you on the cross is present future eternal you who know him as Lord and

Saviour you gave your life to him your sins were as deep as scarlet but now you've got to change your soiled robes as it were soiled garments to robes of white but is that all of you are you all clothed with Christ's righteousness or are some of you still wearing these soiled garments of sin that have never been washed by the blood of the Lord Jesus if that's you then come to him ask him to give you that change of clothing that change of heart ask him to change these filthy rags for pure white garments of Christ's righteousness these are words of comfort that God gives to you even tonight comfort the comfort of knowing the eternal security in

[32 : 12] Christ because of what he's done for you but there's more comfort here in the passage in verse 5 where Jesus says of those who are truly faithful and remain faithful I'll not blot out his name out of the book of life but acknowledge his name before my father and before his angels I'll not blot out his name out of the book of life at that time citizens had their names registered in a document anyone who died in that city or anyone who was executed in that city they had their names erased blotted out from that document that register but we're promised that all who have us at where their names written in the book of life whose names are recorded in heaven itself will not have that name your name blotted out your name's written you who are his your name's written it's indelible it's indelibly written in heaven you can never lose your being on god's register your name's there forever more you who are in christ and you know when that roll call of heaven's read out it's jesus who vouches for every single name in that book that register and he acknowledges every single name in that register worthy to be in that book of life not worthy in ourselves but worthy because of what he's done for you that's what jesus said v. 10-12 whoever acknowledges me before men i will acknowledge him before my father in heaven is jesus acknowledging you before his father is he acknowledging you before his angels do you belong to the lord jesus eternally get that hope of eternal life in christ have you trusted him for your salvation or have you still turned your back on him well as jesus says here you have an ear to hear what the spirit is saying to the church well listen to what the spirit is saying to the church know the savior follow him and live for him and know that eternal security in him now and forever war you know i'm sure that when these words were read out to that church in sardis that they were deeply challenged and we are deeply challenged we're all deeply challenged by these words because you know not just today but all days we need to be you know so so reminded of of of god's word reminded to be shaken out of our spiritual complacency because that sort of complacency is our approach to any congregation any church that complacency that says that we're alright we're self-satisfied we profess

Jesus as lord but acting as if he isn't lord if that's the case in my life and in your life let's join together and cry out to the lord as david the psalmist cried out to the lord in psalm 139 psalm we're going to sing in a minute see if there's any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting amen and let us pray lord lead us we pray in that way everlasting and if there is any offensive way in us then lord show us show us your ways and teach us your paths that we might walk in them convict us lord of our sins we pray as we repent of them even now in the in the quiet of our hearts as we seek to be rid of that complacency and that compromising of self and seek lord to follow you hear us as we continue in worship before you now we pray these things in jesus name amen so coisas se perti ■ que

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