

# James Barnett

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     What matters most in life is what other people think of me. What do you think of this statement? What matters most in life is what other people think of me.
- Do you think this way? Maybe unintentionally sometimes? I want to have a really good reputation. I want other people to think of me highly. That's how I'll get a pay increase.
- That's how I'll get that promotion. That's how I'll get that girl to notice me. I'll have a great reputation. I'll make myself look better to the boss. I'll get to work really early.
- I'll leave late. I might try and dress up for the girl and for the boss maybe. Do you ever think this way? How about this statement?
- What matters most in life is what God thinks of me. This one is a bit scarier. What matters most in life is what God thinks of me.
- [ 1 : 0 0 ]     Who here could say that they are concerned about what God thinks about them all the time? Not me. I want to be able to say this.
- I wish this was true. But it's not. And it's scary because God sees everything. It's not like I can just do a couple of nice things. Look pretty good on the outside.
- Wear some fashionable clothes. And God's going to think all of a sudden that I'm a good guy. What is your reputation before God?
- Today we're continuing in our series in the book of Revelation. And we're looking at Jesus' letter to the city and to the church of Sardis.
- And Jesus knows all about this city's reputation. And he has some hard words for them. So we're going to see what Jesus says to Sardis before we see what Jesus has to say to us.
- [ 1 : 5 5 ]     So please have your Bibles open at Revelation chapter 3 verse 1. 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.
- I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive. But you are dead. The church in Sardis had a reputation.
- They looked alive. There were outward signs of vigor and spirituality. People would have exclaimed, Oh, this church, they're so healthy. They're so vibrant. They're so alive.
- There's so much happening. They would have looked like paradise to some of the other churches. To the other churches in the area who were facing persecution, Sardis would have been like a holiday destination of a church.
- They're so vibrant. They're growing. Their preaching is so entertaining and short. Their whole church service doesn't even go for an hour. Praise Jesus. The other churches we've heard about in Revelation, Well, they're doing it tough.
- [ 3 : 0 5 ]     You can imagine them saying, I wish I was at that church in Sardis. I wish I lived in that city so I wasn't faced with the persecution, with the poverty, with the starvation and fear of death that I'm facing.

Because there's something unique about this city. This church in Sardis. There is no persecution mentioned. In all of these letters to the different cities, there's persecution mentioned in all of them except here in Sardis.

The church at Ephesus was struggling with evil people. In Smyrna, there was tribulation and poverty. In Pergamum, Jesus says that Satan has power over this place.

And in Thyatira, we saw last week, they're faced with the sexual immorality of Jezebel. And to each of these cities, even though there's persecution, Jesus has something positive to say.

But when we get to Sardis, it's a different story. Jesus has nothing positive to say about this city. Instead, Jesus says, I know your works.

[ 4 : 18 ] You have the reputation of being alive. But you are dead. You are a dead church. You have it easy.

There's no persecution from outside. To all the world, you look like a healthy, vibrant church. But really, you are a husk of a church. Once alive, but now dead.

This reputation that this church has, it's just all fake. It's just all lies. Because the problem is, there's a gap between their reputation and reality.

Sardis has a very different reputation with God. Have a look at the second part of verse 2 with me. For I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

The church is obviously busy, doing all kinds of works, probably very good works, feeding the poor, going to church every day, reading the Bible. But before God, their works were not complete.

[ 5 : 22 ] They were just going through the motions. Their works are not the result of obedience and repentance. From the outside, they looked like they were doing what churches do, following God.

But to God, they were fake. Just going through the motions. Jesus says in verse 4, that there are still a few who hadn't let death overtake them.

There are still a few who were following Jesus. And they're described as not having soiled their clothes. It's a really graphic image. You know, I've got two little children. I can tell you what soiled clothes look like.

It's very graphic. These people have not let defilement come in. The implication for the rest of the church is, defilement sin has crept in.

They have soiled their clothes with it. And it's made a mess of their lives. The sin of the other cities was obvious. They were worshipping other gods. They were sexually immoral.

[ 6 : 23 ] But here, the sin of Sardis was more subtle. It was hidden. And the problem is that the church had gotten lazy.

They'd been convinced that their busyness was a sign that they were healthy. They had a reputation that they were alive. And they were convinced by their own reputation.

It seems that they hadn't checked their heart before God. They hadn't asked the question, are we just turning up to church on Sunday? Or are we being passionate about Jesus, wanting to do His will, and to love and serve Him?

Or are we just going through the motions? We would probably call these people nominal Christians. People who just turn up on Sunday. Maybe they give money.

Maybe they go along to Bible study. Maybe they even get involved in things like supper and going out afterwards. Maybe they read the Bible. Maybe they help out when they need it.

[ 7 : 23 ] They know the right words to say. They know what it looks like to be a Christian. They look right. They sound right. They smell right. But they don't live out that obedience to Jesus.

There's a gap between the head and the heart. It's a thing that happens on Sundays and they don't love Jesus. There is no heart connection.

This behavior, it's really hypocrisy. Saying one thing and doing another. The church in Sardis, they thought, look, I'm going through the motions. I'm doing these things and therefore God must live.

If I tick these boxes, I'm all right with God. This church had forgotten what they had heard. They had turned away and forgotten about Jesus.

These are hard words to hear. Everything you've been doing as a church has been a waste. You think you've been loving God, but you as a church are dead.

[ 8 : 26 ] This is damning. And it's probably the hardest words that Jesus has to say to any of these cities. But Jesus doesn't leave them there in this position.

He gives them some words. He gives them some things to wake up. And the first of them, have a look in verse 2 again. He says, wake up. Or more literally, it's watch out.

Watch out. Now, if you came from Sardis, these words, watch out, would have a very special meaning for you. Let me just give you a brief picture of Sardis' history.

The city of Sardis actually had a wonderful reputation. At one point, they were one of the most powerful cities. The city, the majority of the city, was located on top of a mountain, Mount Tmolus.

And it had these massive walls. Walls that were over 1,500 feet high. If you don't know the measurement feet, that means it's really big walls. And this city, they just had the reputation that you don't mess with Sardis.

[ 9 : 35 ] You can't get through these walls. So armies didn't come against them because they had this reputation of being totally impenetrable. But twice in its history, first by Cyrus in the 6th century and then by Antiochus the Great in the 3rd century, they overtook this city.

Not by sending a massive army against these walls, but by sending a few men to climb up over the wall when no one was looking to open the gates to let the army in.

The failure of the city of Sardis was that they didn't watch out. They didn't have people watching the walls for that subtle hidden attack from their enemy.

They thought they were invincible. They believed their own reputation. So when Jesus says to the church in Sardis, watch out, it's a reminder of what had happened to this city.

Watch out for sin that has crept into your lives, which has climbed over the walls of your defences when you weren't looking and has rotted you out like a worm in a piece of fruit.

[ 10 : 45 ] Don't be lazy. Watch out. Don't think all is well. Don't think your Christian faith won't be tested. So Sardis needs to watch out because they've become complacent.

The second thing that Jesus says is to strengthen what remains, again in verse 2. Strengthen what remains. There are still some in the city and in the church of Sardis who are following Jesus.

And the command is that they are to strengthen what remains. Exhort the others in the church to watchfulness. A strong church will care for each brother and sister.

If you're a committed Christian, you can't just worry about yourself. That's the Western individualistic lie that we live in. But you're to encourage, to rebuke, to love your brothers and sisters.

When you see your brother or sister sinning, tell them to stop. Make sure that the church doesn't get infested with hollowed out Christians.

[ 11 : 51 ] People who come along to church and confess his name with their mouths, but throughout the week they just worship themselves. Worshiping other gods or worshiping themselves with their time and money.

The Christians in the city of Sardis should have been watching out for themselves and for their brothers and sisters to encourage what remained. And the third imperative that Jesus gives to fix this church, he says it in verse 3, Remember.

Remember what you have received and heard. Remember the gospel. That's what they had heard. The good news that Jesus died and rose. And what did they receive?

Well, they'd receive forgiveness, new life, the promise of resurrection with Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within. Don't forget this. Coe, where are you?

Brother, for you today, don't forget today. Don't forget today's date. It's the 31st of August, 2014. Have that tattooed on the back of your hand, maybe the back of your eyelid.

[ 12 : 57 ] So when you close your eyes, you're reminded of today. Because today is the day you have heard the gospel. Today is the day where you stood right here and were baptized and you said, I'm going to follow Jesus.

Today is the day that I am going to turn away from my sin and I'm going to turn to Jesus and follow Him. In years to come, when it gets difficult, following Jesus is hard.

Remember the gospel you have heard today. For those of us who have been Christians for a while, remember that time when you first took ownership of God.

Whether it was five years ago, 10, 20, 50, I don't care what it is. Remember when you first heard the gospel. This shouldn't make us feel guilty, but it's a reminder of what God has been doing in us, for us.

And could it be that for this church and for us that they should remember the passion and faithfulness which they had initially accepted the gospel?

[ 14 : 01 ] When they were first on fire for Jesus, when they gave away their possessions when it hurt, when they loved Jesus even in the face of opposition, the way that they lived until sin crept over their walls and hollowed them out from the inside.

Instead, turn away from the world, live a life transformed by Jesus, not one worshipping idols. Instead, again, the next thing Jesus says is to obey the gospel, obey it and repent.

Jesus calls on this dead church to turn away from their life of sin, their false worship, their routine of church which is not really church. Renew their worship of Jesus.

I think this is one of the hardest parts of being a Christian, consistently considering your heart and your actions before God through His Spirit. our desires quickly and easily get defiled by sin which creeps into our lives like an attack over the wall of Sardis.

We're bombarded by sexualized images in media, on billboards and so that step to looking at pornography is so much smaller and easier.

[ 15 : 26 ] we get into dangerous patterns where sin creeps in and we don't consider God. Our heart and our desires get perverted and it happens subtly.

Let me share something that happened to me earlier in the year. I don't mind a drink of alcohol occasionally as long as you're over 18.

You know, a glass of wine or a beer on occasions. I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with these things but I suppose it depends on the person. But what happened for me was a difficult thing.

I'm sure many of you, well not many of you, I'm sure some of you have had real struggles in the big scheme of things. Mine is quite small but what happened for me is that Alyssa has been studying the diploma in Bible and ministry through, well college, on a Wednesday night and so Alyssa would go out on a Wednesday night, I would put Isaac to bed and I would have these glorious two hours where I could watch whatever I want on TV.

I could relax, I didn't have to watch MasterChef or whatever Alyssa usually watches. And so I would relax and I'd have a drink. It could be a glass of wine, a beer and you know, maybe just one or two.

[ 16 : 47 ] I wasn't that many a week. You know, I might have one on a night. I wasn't getting drunk. I didn't become an alcoholic. But what happened was I began to tie relaxing with having a drink.

And so when I wanted to relax on the weekend, well I'd have a drink. And I noticed all of a sudden that I was heading down a dangerous path.

I noticed that if I continued in the pattern I was setting, it would get dangerous for me. So I took a month off alcohol.

I just wanted to kill this relationship I had with relaxation. I didn't become an alcoholic and I'm not necessarily saying there's anything wrong with it.

But for me, at this point, I noticed it was becoming a dangerous habit. Because our desires quickly and easily get defiled by sin.

[ 17 : 50 ] It creeps into our lives like an attack over the wall when we're not watching. We need to continually obey God, to repent, to turn away from our sin.

For those who do repent, Jesus calls them conquerors. Have a look at verse 5 with me. 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. Clothed in white, purified, there is no more sin attached to them. Written in the book of life.

I'm not sure if there is a literal book that God writes in. I don't think it really matters. but what is important here is the assurance that Jesus gives. It is worthwhile turning aside from the world and following Jesus because we can have assurance that we will have new life with him.

Jesus will tell his father about us. We will have the absolute best reputation. We will be given white garments we don't deserve, a reputation we don't deserve, because it will be Christ's reputation.

[ 19 : 08 ] And that is the one which God will see. So there is some hope for this church of Sardis. While they are dead, if they repent and turn back to Jesus, there is hope.

But if they don't, there is judgment coming for them. Have a look again at verse 3 with me. Jesus says he will come to Sardis in judgment, just like the judgment and the attacks that came against the city of Sardis.

They came unexpectedly, secretly in the night, scaling over the wall, and Jesus says he will come unexpectedly. If they don't repent and turn back to him, he will come in judgment.

So the question I asked at the start, let me ask that question again, what is your reputation before God? If Jesus was writing a letter to this city and to this church and to you specifically, what would he say?

would he say, I know your deeds. You look alive, but you are dead. I have found you wanting in the sight of God.

[ 20 : 39 ] You are just going through the motions. You are going to church when you feel like it. You consider once a month regular. How can you hear my words and follow me if you're not being encouraged with your brothers and sisters to do that?

How can you help love and build others up in the church if you're not even there? Would Jesus say, I love you and I want you to know what I do for you and what I will do for you.

I want you to know how much pain I went through on the cross. But you do not remember what you have heard. You have blocked the gospel from going to your ears because you have heard it all before and you think you know it.

Would Jesus say you have become a hollowed out husk of a Christian? See the problem is we're prideful.

We sin and say that everything is okay. Have you heard of the miracle of the car park, the church car park? This is the miracle where as a family you're in the car on the way to church and you're having a massive argument.

[ 21 : 52 ] It could be about anything. The colour of the sheets, whatever it is. You're having this massive argument. As soon as you get to church, you're putting your happy faces. Everything's fine. We're Christians.

We're wonderful people. We're always fine. You go to church, you pretend everything is fine and normal in your house, you get back in the car and as soon as you're out on the street, that argument starts again.

It's just pride. It's the sin of Sardis. We think we've got everything together. We think that everything's fine. We don't want to be honest and reveal our sin to other people.

That would just be too humiliating. We think we're alive, but really we're in trouble of being dead because we won't confront our own sin.

Repent of your sin. You don't have to pretend everything is alright, especially when you come to church. If you can't be honest with the people at church who go through the same thing and love you, how are you going to do it in the rest of the world?

[ 22 : 56 ] If you want to confess, you can come up the front after church and pray with us. Because Jesus doesn't want a church who appears healthy on the outside, but he wants honest people who through his love and grace consider their actions, consider their hearts and repent.

sin. They turn away from their sin. They don't just look healthy on the outside but are fakes, but are honest before God. Let me be completely honest with you.

Removing sin and turning to God, it's hard. It hurts. It hurts to cut sin out of our lives. Let me tell you another story from my life a little bit more recently.

I'm sorry if this feels like I'm confessing all my sin to you and I just have this urge to tell you. I hope you can take something from the pain I've gone through and not go through that same pain yourself.

Our household is a smacking household. That's for Isaac, our two and a half year old, not for Tamara, the four week old. She's perfect, she can't do anything wrong, so I'm sure that will change.

[ 24 : 09 ] I'm not sure what you think of this. If it's really an issue for you, we can talk about it later. But we think with Isaac that it helps him to understand the seriousness of some of the things he does.

So if he's trying to put his fingers into a fan, we say, Isaac, don't do that. If he tries it again, we say, Isaac, don't do that. That will hurt you. You'll lose a finger. There'll be blood everywhere. If you do it again, we're going to smack you.

If he does it again, we smack him. It had been working well, but until recently, when parenting Isaac, I had let sin creep in.

Sin had climbed in over the walls and attacked the way I disciplined him. Instead of smacking Isaac out of love, I began to do it out of frustration and anger.

Things had gotten more difficult just before we had Tamara. That's not an excuse. It's just things had tried my patience continually and I was not up to it.

[ 25 : 14 ] Isaac was still often warned and he still often needed to be smacked, but I began to let my frustration and anger show when I disciplined him.

I was confronted with my sin before God and I thought, how can I deal with my little son? How can I deal with him in anger when my God, my father in heaven who loves me, sent his son to die for me?

How can I do that to this little boy? So I decided I couldn't do it anymore. I'm taking a time off smacking. It's much more labor intensive.

I told Alyssa this. She had no idea what had been going on inside me. My sin was hidden even from my wife, but not from my God.

let's not be a church who pretends everything is fine, resting on our reputation that we have. Yeah, we're a church that's alive.

[ 26 : 20 ] Let's not rest on that. Let's consider our hearts and do the painful work through God's grace and through his spirit of cutting sin out.

Watch out for sin creeping into your life. watch out for your brother and sister. If you can't see any sin in your brother or sister's life, ask them what they're struggling with.

What kind of reputation will you have before God? Will Jesus say, you have just gone through the motions, you have not loved me?

Will he say that we are a dead church? Or will he say, well done, good and faithful servants? God's grace. Let's pray that we would allow God's grace to continue to work in us so that we can be more like him each day.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the warning to Sardis and the warning to us.

[ 27 : 27 ] Help us not be complacent in our sin. Help us consider our hearts. love you and turn aside from everything that gets in the way.

Through your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen.