

Revelation 3:1-6

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[0 : 00] And seven stars, I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive when you are dead. Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in 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 cast his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

He who has near, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. When I was a kid, our family took a vacation to California once, and while we were there, we went to this church called the Crystal Defeat Room.

[1 : 16] When it was built, it was the largest glass building in the world, 10,000 paintings of glass, specially built to withstand 8.0 earthquake. It seated 3,000 people for multiple services on Sundays.

The pastor was in the National TV program, and when we went there, we saw their concert production. It included live donkeys, lambs, goats, peacocks, a camel, and even a tiger.

It was quite impressive. Five years ago, that same church filed for bankruptcy and sold their building. Churches rise, and churches fall.

Sometimes churches begin with great energy and vigor, and sometimes churches decline and eventually collapse. But very often, there's a current time in the middle when a church appears to be lively and actively outside, and on the inside, it's falling apart.

And this is the case for the church in Sardis. And this letter is written to you. The first one said they had a reputation or a name of being alive, but in reality, they were dead.

[2 : 30] There was an appearance of vitality and activity and a reality of complacency and compromise. Tonight, we'll be at Jesus' words to this church that looked very impressive on the outside, and on the inside, it was dying.

So if you want to look at this letter in two parts, we make those parts. First, the warning that Jesus gives in verses 2 and 3, and second, the promise that he extends in verses 4 and 5.

So first, the warning that Jesus gives in verses 2 and 3. Now, a little bit of background. The city of Sardis had an impressive history. In the 6th century B.C., it was one of the most powerful cities in the ancient world.

It was the capital of an ancient kingdom called Lydia. It explained the thing was it was the first city to make gold and silver coins. They mined gold from the river nearby, and they claimed to have invented the process for dying gold.

The city was also in a powerful location. It was on top of a 1,500-foot cliff. Now, look at Eastrop that way. That's four times the height of Eastrop. And the city was on top of the cliff, but on three sides.

[3 : 44] It had these very steep cliff sides, and only one side was a way to reasonably approach it. And so it was almost impossible to attack and conquer.

Sometimes people would say, that would be like a conquering Sardis, which meant that's impossible. The city also expanded. It had both an upper site and a lower site.

It had a leader, a stadium, a temple. It had a great reputation. But by the time this letter was written, Sardis had gone into some decline. There was a magnificent temple, column 60 feet high, that's about as high as the ceiling, built in the ancient world.

It had been destroyed, and it was only half rebuilt, and it was never fully rebuilt. Standing in the middle of the city, half rebuilt. 1817, there was a catastrophic earthquake.

Much of the city was destroyed, and the city was rebuilt. It only was held five years, so that's the relief funds from the Roman Emperor. But it never achieved its former glory.

[4 : 50] It never got back to its glorious past. And Jesus is saying to the church of the city, he's saying beware, because the same thing can happen to your city, can also happen to your church.

It gives a strong warning. There's five things that the Denver Church, two and three systems, five commands, imperatives, wake up, strengthen our veins, remember, keep, repent.

It's an urgent message, sort of like a fire alarm. It's not pleasant to hear. Eminent danger, immediate response required, wake up.

Jesus is saying, it's possible to have an impressive appearance. Glorious history, awesome films, and all kinds of exciting stuff going on. Even think about our own church. Turn together, glorious history.

We have a pretty cool story. You can read it on our website. 15 years ago, the church was about to close. There were 20 or 30 people, and I brought a new pastor, this is the right time, and brought new life to this church.

[5 : 56] It's a pretty cool history. They're just pretty neat building. Right? If you like to take glass windows, they're pretty good at staying glass windows. They're exterminators.

They're, you know, they're a special kind. They weren't in very many places. Right? We've got all kinds of exciting stuff going on. New people coming into town. Young families having kids.

a great pastor, John Stav, excited to be through. But the question is, for our church, or for any church, where does all of our activity come from? Is our activity, is it rooted in a life-based relationship with Jesus, or is it motivated by all kinds of other temporary motivations?

You know, people come to church, and do church stuff for all kinds of reasons. Here's just a few. Some people, some kids don't please their parents, right? That'll last until you grow up and leave the house, if that's the reason.

Some people come and please their boyfriend or girlfriend. That'll last until you break up or you decide you can please your boyfriend or girlfriend in other ways, and so it doesn't matter too much about the church.

[7 : 05] Some people come with their loan, and more. Nothing better to do. Well, that'll last until you find a job, or find a new hobby, or find something else you want to do on Sundays.

Some people come because they want to have power and be respected in coming to church. Maybe not sometimes in Goodhaven, maybe not in parts of the world, in parts of the country. That's the thing to do.

That's the perspective of the thing to do. Some people come because they're desperate. Right? Some people realize, my life is falling apart, I don't have any money, I'm going to come on the verge of being homeless, and I need help, I need to pray, I need to go to church.

And then a couple months later, their life gets better. What happens? Right? Some people come because they've been going to church and prevented them from having to deal with, it'll be sort of like a lucky charm.

I went to church this Sunday, I'll be okay this week. Nothing really bad will happen to me. But then what if something really bad does happen to you? You're going to get angry, you're not going to leave.

[8 : 13] You see, all those motivations are temporary. They don't last. Now, I just don't want to sleep. Why do I come to church?

Maybe it's one of those weeks, I mean, to be honest, right? I mean, I started coming to church before I knew it with my parents' property. I had no choice in that. Right? None of us start coming to church for purely God-centered reasons.

We all come for a mixed reason. But the question is, over time, what does your reason become? And if you begin to see that Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure in all the world, He's the holy and awesome King of the universe, He's our merciful and faithful Savior and advocate, you begin to see that.

Then, you will begin to have a truly lasting motivation to come to church and participate in church activities.

And, for the rest of your life. because you'll be abiding in Jesus, that's what the Bible calls it, abiding in Jesus. Jesus said, I'm the vine, you are the branches, and you abide in me like a branch is connected to the vine and have my life flowing into you, then you'll bear the fruit, and the fruit will

last.

[9 : 44] That's what Jesus says. It's a true life in a church that has to come from abiding in Jesus Christ. And you can motivate people in all kinds of other ways.

But all those other ways are eventually are only going to be tempered. And they won't matter. So Jesus is warning this church in Sardis.

He says, I know it hurts. You're doing all kinds of stuff. It looks really impressive on the outside.

You've got a great reputation. And I see the inside.

And you're not abiding and rooted in the life of Jesus. Verse 2, he says, I've not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

And I say, what does that mean? I mean, really, aren't all our works in the sight of heaven? Well, in one sense, yes. In another sense, no. In that same chapter, John 15, where Jesus is talking about abiding in Him as the vine, he says, this is like women that you love and others that you enjoy, saying be, complete or full.

[10 : 59] So when we abide in Jesus, when we obey and love each other, He gives us a fullness and a complete joy. Or in James, it says, testing your faith and persevere and let persevere and finish its work so you'll be mature and complete.

See, the problem with the church in Sardis is that they weren't persevering in Jesus. They weren't abiding in Jesus, so they didn't have that completeness of joy, that completeness that God builds in us as we persevere and as we abide in Jesus.

It seems like, it seems like what happened is the church in Sardis just sort of blended into the pagan society that they lived in. And the way temple opened their city, it wasn't a temple just wanted to God, it was a temple of the hearts of the Greek pagan gods.

And it seemed like in this pagan city the churches just wanted to blend in. And if you notice, all the letters you've read so far in the other four churches, Ephesus, Philadelphia, Thyatira, Pergamum, all four of those churches were experiencing opposition from the outside.

Or, some false teachers tried to undermine from the inside in Sardis, there's no reference to either of those. they don't seem to be facing any opposition from the surrounding altar, from the surrounding world, and they don't seem to be having any false teaching that's destroying the church, but they just were pointing in.

[12 : 42] So, they're not facing opposition because they're just, you can't really tell them to be different. So, Jesus says, wake up, spread the wrong names.

Then he says, remember and repent. He tells them how to find life again. And what he basically says is, go back to where you started.

Remember what you received and heard. If you get lost in the woods, I don't know if you've ever been lost in the woods, what the same thing to do is to retrace your steps until you find a landmark that you recognize.

you're lost on the roads, right, my tendency is, I'm going to find a shortcut, right? There's a triangle over here, I'm going to find a shortcut.

And it never works. Right? Sometimes, when I was dating my wife, we were up with my family in the White Mountains in New Hampshire, we went for a drive, watched the sunset, and we were driving on this road, and I thought, we've gone here, we're over here, we just need to go here.

[13 : 58] And I led us through a dirt road, saw a moose, and it was not best, it was a couple weeks before I was riding on the road, it wasn't quite the best thing that I did, to show my trustworthiness, right, and wisdom, or my stubbornness, we wanted to get it home, but, anyway, go back to where we started, and he said, remember what you received and heard.

So, all the facts mean, remember the gospel, Jesus Christ is what he said, right? They received a message about Jesus, who lived, who died, who rose again, who ascended to heaven, who ascended in his Holy Spirit, he said, remember that.

Remember the thing that first brought you to life as a Christian? What was the thing that you first heard and God did something in your heart and who said, and you woke up and got brought you to life?

Remember that message, that first brought you to life, and don't never let it go. Don't ever turn away from it. turn back to the Lord Jesus.

He said, Luke, the morning in the section of verse 3. He said, if you don't, wait up. If you will come, you're excused, that here this morning, I will not let you leave, and you won't know what hour I can

be against you.

[15:35] And the people of Sardis probably will never let you back. because twice in your street, they are an uncomfortable city on top of the cliff that you conquer.

And you don't mind having both times, because they weren't watchful. Right? In the 90s, Persians had a really good rock climb.

And he climbed up the face of the cliff where nobody expected it to, and he found his way inside the city and then he ran to the gate and opened the gate for the army to come in.

And they were coming. And then, 300 years later, it happened again. The Greeks sent 15 guys who climbed up into the wreckage.

And again, they thought, ah, they're going to come up that way. It's a park. We're just flying up off this hill. Nobody's ever going to talk for us until they did once before a long time to go out.

[16:38] It's just 300 years ago. Yes, it did. It's the same thing that we used to spiritually. But the church died.

And you know, if you're in church history, there are some churches that have actually been wiped out. Christians called historians complicated and they went to China in the 7th century and established Christian churches in the 7th cities of China.

But 200 years later, they were completely extinct. And the reason that they died out, is the best thing you can know, is they lost their Christian distinctiveness.

they became dependent on favors from the Chinese emperor, and then the emperor turned against them, and they didn't have the strength to stand on their persecution. And they blended with Buddhism and Taoism.

And they lended them so much that you couldn't really tell what was Christian anymore. They lost their pursuit of distinctiveness and so they were wiped out. They didn't last.

[17:59] Many other examples in church history. So Jesus gave a strong warning to this church. That's the first part of his message.

But he doesn't just give them a warning. In verse 4-5 he also gives out a glorious promise. Verse 4-5 he says yet you have still a few names and starts people who have not soiled their garments. Now first one he's speaking to the church as a reputation that's the same orphan. You have a name as a whole as a group. You have a name of people like you're dead.

But then he says within this church that there's a few names a few people who still have a life human relationship with me.

They haven't soiled their garments. What does that mean? A lot of phrases in your relationship that you create that you are like what does that exactly mean?

[19:16] Well imagine the cross prepared for wedding day. She's standing right back in that way. Doors are closed.

Using display to try to make her possessing in. She looks stunning and glorious. She's been terribly prepared. She got her hair done that morning.

Her cousin is standing right up the earth. They could walk you for this moment where they reunited as husband and wife. And she looks out the window and she sees a \$20 bill blowing across the sidewalk of the wind and it drops into the sewer drain.

And she goes out the door and pulls out the cover of the sewer drain and starts descending down into the sewer to get that \$20 bill. And if you saw her doing that and say you're insane what are you doing wake up why did you give up the precious of what you have for something that's so relatively worthless and that's what Jesus says to Christians who be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus and who run and embrace sin he says that's insane are you are you defiled are you cultivating the beauty of your relationship with Christ by embracing something that's contrary to you instead of trying to be care because this is the beauty and sorrows who remember and who haven't forgotten how precious it is to belong to

Jesus and despite the abathy complacent most of the people in their church to say that is one of their perfect now it doesn't mean they are perfect first we ought to say they are worthy of our life are any just worthy have anybody done smaller garments it doesn't mean they're perfect and flawless in every way but it does mean they held on to Jesus despite pressure to give up they live lives and live to God call us to be as believers right not as we worthy of grace somebody said grace only but Paul says the living life worthy of the gospel and Paul says throughout his letters in fact all he prays may our God be worthy of his calling to call him as

[22 : 26] Christians and sometimes God he described as worthy group of Boaz described as worthy people in other words faithful people people call to be perfect we're called to hold on not keep our eyes on Jesus Paul he says in verse 5 he says he can't hold the top he can't fall down but you don't just lay there as you can come to Jesus and lay to up he keeps you going so Jesus has three promises in verse 5 they're all in common persevere overcome verse 5 the one he conquers will be closed like this in white garments that's promise number one second I will never call his name on the life third

I will confess his name before my father before his name he tried to have a name people like instead there's few names who've been faithful and Jesus saying his promise I will never block your name I will come I will confess his name so three promises close in white garments promises one day we'll leave as a church the pride of Jesus he clothed in his Christ and his church and joy you know back to us just now don't you wear white clothes to a wedding you can ride more like back that soon or you know white to the world to the world to the world to the military victory you wear white you first step back into the city and the great peace to

Jesus saying that we clothed white garments you'll share in my joy in my eternal victory hold on that's the first promise of eternal joy the second promise won't be plotted out with the broken fire you know in each Roman city there was a list of a register of citizens and when you were born a citizen or when you became citizens your name was written down in that book when you died your name will be erased or if you were good reason or some other act deserving definitely your name will be erased in the old testament there's a similar idea that God has a book and written in that book are all the names of his righteous people the people who belong to him and Jesus promises while overcome the way you make it to the end your name will never be erased from that book not to the death right if you live in

Sarnis or a citizen of Sarnis you die in grace Jesus says your citizens of my heavenly kingdom none not to the death and separate you from belonging to me and being part of my kingdom forever he gave that a promise third promise that would confess his name to the poor father and his angels the angels are like the armies of heaven and Jesus made the same promise on earth and his disciples that everyone who acknowledge people for men or confess people for men I also will be acknowledged and profess what my father is heaven when I graduated from college I'm the dean of my college all these names of the graduates one by one walked forward received our diplomas from birth took her hand she said you are now behind all the rights and privileges and responsibility to the graduate of this college now

I don't know maybe you've been in a lot of graduations sometimes they get boring maybe they don't send them out but they're long long speeches they're a little boring most people you don't know why do you go to graduation why do you travel thousands of months and help every spring to New Haven to attend college or high school or other graduations why do you care do you care because you come for one person you come to see them walk up to the front and have your name called and be publicly honored and publicly recognized and publicly given the degree they will receive something special about what Jesus is saying is that there's going to be a graduation and all renovations and King

[27 : 48] Jesus is going to stop one night he is going to be the names of all these people who have been in his grace that go forth and he will confess that before his father in heaven before the angels before the arms in heaven before all creation years can saying so live that Jesus to call our enemies.

He will give us the opportunity that he will say, you're my children. You can now rule with me in the new creation, in the new heavens, in the new earth.

That's the promise. You see, Jesus gives a strong warning to this church. That's all the sleep church that's doing all this stuff that they've lost from the name of Jesus as a whole.

And he says, if you have to make faithful, hang in there. And he says, if everyone in the Lord comes, I'll give this promise.

Because we're part of anything you can have this world. Hold on. Whoever has a year, let's hear. The Spirit says that the church is blessed.

[29 : 28] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this word to the church at Sardis. We thank you for that you speak to us, both as individuals and as a church body.

Lord, we pray that we would listen to the warning, take it seriously, and pray that we would, that it would, that we would not just guard it.

Lord, we pray that we would remember what we have seen at the time, and hold on, and never let it go. And Lord, we pray that we would fix our eyes and pray promises.
Lord, we thank you that we promise it's greater than anything else in this world. We pray that we would treasure you above all of us. We would say we pray.
Amen.