

Jesus speaks to His Church - Wake up and strengthen what remains!

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[0 : 00] Yeah. Good morning, everybody. Nice to see you. We're reading together in Revelation chapter 3. So if you have your Bibles, please turn to Revelation chapter 3.

! We're looking at the seven churches that Jesus speaks to under a series called Jesus Speaks to His Church. Today's message is, Wake up and strengthen what remains. It's the Church of Sardis, which isn't in a good way. But that message, that news came as a bit of a surprise to them. And that, therefore, has something very compelling to say to us and to the Church of Jesus Christ today.

Before we read the Scriptures, I want, for the sake of our visitors, just to say that if you'd been in this building four years ago, it would have looked very different. Most of the walls were gray because the painting had peeled off.

There were holes in the roof, so if it rained, we'd have to have our buckets ready to catch the rain. The floors had woodworm and some of the flooring, and things were falling apart.

[1 : 16] There were no seats downstairs at all. They'd all been taken out and taken away. There was no heating. All kinds of challenges that we faced. And to all intents and purposes, this building was derelict.

It was closed. The congregation that had been here had gone. And it was due to be sold. When we were invited to have a look at the church with a view, because we were in a school, with a view to having a look at this church as a place of worship, to our eyes, it was impossible.

But as we stood on the balcony for elders at the time, we realized that what was impossible with men is possible with God.

That what appears dead can live again. That what appears to be hopeless can once again have hope. And look at the difference today.

We woke up. We strengthened what remained. And this building began to live again. Now, the building is not a church. It's a building.

[2 : 34] The Church of Jesus Christ is where two or three gather together in his name. What the building does, however, is it provides an identity in the community.

It provides a place where God's people, God's family can come together and work and offer service and offer witness in the community.

And looking out today and seeing so many people, from where we were to where we are now, is quite a remarkable work of God. We woke up.

We repented. And we strengthened what remained. And we began to live again. So with that in mind, let's read Revelation chapter 3.

It will come up on the screen, verses 1 to 6. 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.

[3 : 40] I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up. Strengthen what remains and is about to die.

For I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard. Obey it and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not sold their clothes. They will walk with me dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.

I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. So this is Sardis, and Sardis is a place in Asia Minor, again, a ruin no longer in existence.

[4 : 55] But if you visit Turkey, you'll be able to visit the ruins at least. And it was a very famous, and thought to be an impregnable city, because like a lot of these cities, it was situated on a very high mountain.

And it had its citadel there. And it had a famous king called Croesus, who was the Bill Gates of his day. You know, if you want to know who the richest man in the world was, you would say it was Bill Gates.

Well, in those days, in the 550s BC, it was Croesus. His armies had conquered many lands, and he inherited much wealth, and he was famed for spending it lavishly.

And people came to visit him in the hope that he might be favorable toward them in some way.

Croesus believed his city to be impregnable.

And so when he faced the enemy Persians under Cyrus, who became King Cyrus the Great, he was fairly sure that though there was a massed army in front of his walls, they would not be able to get in to the city and conquer it.

[6 : 12] Except his complacency caught him out. And King Cyrus and his engineers devised a way of getting into the city in a place nobody would expect.

And the city was taken, and the great King Croesus was spared and became a servant of King Cyrus. But Sardis lost its independence, and it never regained it.

It was a vassal state to the Persians first, then the Macedonians under Alexander the Great, and then the Romans. A city that thought it was impregnable, that thought it had nothing to worry about, because of its laziness and its complacency, was a city that was eventually defeated.

And Sardis, a church that had the reputation for being alive, that thought itself impregnable, that thought itself safe and secure, is a church that is about to die.

You get the point? You see the purpose of the words of Jesus here to this particular church. And this is what makes this particular passage a really important one for us to consider.

[7 : 36] We can all kind of make value judgments on churches. This church was a church that had died, although it appeared to be the case anyway.

The congregation was no more. The church was derelict. Nobody knows exactly why it got to be in that position. But the call, and there would have been many calls over the years, to heed Jesus and to repent and to wake up, must have from time to time not been heard.

You can come in now and you can go away if you're a visitor. That's a very lively church. It's good to see the work of God going on. You can carry the reputation away with you and say, oh, if you go to Whitby, why don't you visit?

I hope you'll do that. But there's an equal danger for us to face as well. That we can be a church that develops a reputation for being alive, but also could be dead.

For if we are not listening to the voice of the Spirit, if we are not hearing what Christ is saying to His church, then regardless of our reputation, we are dead.

[8 : 55] And so the goal of this sermon is to call us to self-examination and renewal. Now, we don't like self-examination very much, do we?

Unless you're one of these kind of people who just spend all of your time examining your diet and your exercise regime and counting your calories and doing that, and you've got into the habit of doing that every day.

That's quite popular now, isn't it? People look, I need to get healthier, and so they do that. And so they overly self-examine, perhaps, at times. Nothing wrong with that. It's better than being complacent, isn't it?

It is true in the spiritual life, too, that we have to constantly and regularly self-examine. Where am I with Jesus? What is my Christian life really like?

Is the Bible precious to me? Do I read it on a daily basis? Do I regularly call upon God in prayer? Do I constantly seek the fellowship of God's people?

[9 : 58] And when that begins to be hindered in some way in our lives, when we neglect those spiritual disciplines on a daily basis, sometimes we have to just stop ourselves and say, why am I unhappy?

Why am I struggling? Why am I full of doubts and fears? And then we take ourselves in hand and say, I need to do something. Not because we are ever saved by those things.

We are always saved by grace. But because we want to maintain our relationship with Jesus. And that doesn't happen if we just become spiritually lazy and indifferent to what are called the means of grace that bring us to Him.

And so this is a call to watch out for spiritual complacency and to take a spiritual inventory so that we truly reflect on where we are with Jesus.

And if we begin to do so, that will lead to spiritual renewal. And then our broken down houses or our broken down churches may begin to look splendid again.

[11 : 18] Behind me is a sign. It was redone. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. I have a picture of it when half of the paintwork was missing. I could still work out what was said or worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

But we wanted that restored. We wanted that to look right. Because if we are truly seeking to be holy people and to worship and serve a holy God, we don't want holes in our lives.

We don't want that to look ugly. It cannot. It would be a contradiction in terms. If my heart cries out holiness to the Lord, then my actions will accompany that desire.

So, what can we learn then from this church? Go to that slide. First of all, the reputation, the next slide, sorry, reputation versus reality.

That's a very good quote by N.T. Wright. Sorry, I've already said it though, so you can ignore it. It's been said. Reputation versus reality. We're all of us concerned about our reputations.

[12 : 30] They're important to us. If we're people of integrity, we care about what people think about us. And as a church, we care about what people think about us. We want people to think that this is a church that loves Jesus, that the Holy Spirit flows, and where people find life in Him.

We want that. But it's possible for us to have the wrong impression of who we really are.

And so Christ challenges this church against its claim to be a solid and dependable and faithful church of Jesus Christ.

Notice 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. Now, just before I say the next bit, just to explain.

The seven spirits of God, it could be translated as the sevenfold spirit of God. The number seven is important. It's a number of completion or perfection. For in six days the Lord created heaven and earth, and the seventh day He rested, and He said everything is very good.

[13 : 40] Very good. So it's a number of perfection. So perhaps this is a way of talking of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit being that divine being of perfection who knows and sees all things.

The seven stars, well, John has already told us in Revelation 1, that they are the seven messengers or seven angels, one for each of the seven churches. So Jesus is saying, I know all about your church.

I see you. I uphold you. And I see and uphold those who lead your church. I hold them in my hand. So I'm in control.

Everything's fine. And then He says, I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. That's devastating. That's like kind of going into the doctor, and the doctor says, how are you?

You say, I feel great. He said, well, I'm sorry to say, we just run tests, and you've got stage four cancer. You're about to die. That's devastating. None of us want to hear that from Jesus.

[14 : 50] But you see, what Jesus thinks of us is what really matters. Everything else pales into insignificance, because we want to hear what is true and what is real.

And in spite of all of their faults, says Michael Wilcox, in all of the churches so far addressed, Christ has recognized much good.

So all of the churches in chapter 2, there was something that was good. There was something that He could commend. But in this church, ironically, the one church that was not being persecuted, the one church that did not have heretics in it, in this church, which to all extents and purposes had it the easiest, it was the most indifferent.

And that's the problem with life, isn't it? In life, when everything is going well and it couldn't be better and we think it's wonderful, it's usually then that we're at our most vulnerable.

Because we forget what's needed to make us strong. What makes us strong is not ease. What makes us strong is adversity.

[15 : 59] We build our muscles when we strain them. When we put in the effort and the energy, we build our spiritual muscles in similar situations.

They have a reputation for being alive, but they are dead because they are lazy and they are indifferent and they are worldly and they have lost a sense of being in a battle. And we are called upon to be in a battle constantly. For our enemies, Paul says, are not flesh and blood, but their principalities and powers in heavenly realms. And when we take up spiritual armor to fight Satan in this world, who Jesus calls the God of this world, we will face his onslaughts in very direct and very subtle ways. And we will be wounded because of that. But we must stand firm. But if everything is going swimmingly, if everything is just a wonderful blessing all of the time, if there's never challenge, if there's never hurt, if there's never pain, if there's never blood, then perhaps it's not because we are being faithful, it's because we are sleeping.

[17 : 23] And we must wake up against such a challenge. This is what we refer to as the danger of backsliding. What I used to love when it was kind of rephrased, slack abiding.

What is backsliding? Slack abiding. You know what it's like to slack abide. It usually happens over Christmas, doesn't it? You kind of think, I'm going to just kind of exercise a bit and diet a little bit just before Christmas so I can indulge myself. Stay up a bit longer. Eat a bit more. Well, more than a bit more. Drink a little bit more than you should. Watch so many, too many films, you know, Home Alone for the hundredth time. Just because it's dead. What happens on January the 3rd? You think, where's the scale? Look at me. Get me some salad. Who does salad in February? In January, rather. Nobody, do they? Yeah. What do we realize? We realize that vegging out, oh, it's not vegging.

[18 : 31] It's not vegging out. You put that vegetarian in me. But we realize that that kind of indiscipline is not good for us. Slack abiding.

Now, I'm not much of a gardener. My mother-in-law will tell you that. I know about plants. They're usually green. That's about all I know about plants. And yesterday, I moved one because I wanted to keep it. Kind of a climbing thing. So, I remember how I buried it in the patio and I kind of wanted to move it to preserve it. Probably killed it. But I managed to get it transplanted. And then I thought, it was a very hot day. I better water it. Good idea that occasionally. I forget to do that sometimes. And plants die, don't they, when you don't water them? So, anyway, at the end of the day, I watered it. And I looked around my other plants and I realized some of them were dying, really badly dying. Oh, dear.

[19 : 33] I've not looked after you very well. Now, the problem for my poor plants in my garden is they have a very poor gardener who neglects them. What happens if you neglect plants? Well, they wither up and they die, don't they? What happens to our spiritual lives if we neglect to water them? They will wither up and die. The fault of the gardener. Jesus says, I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does not bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Here is the difference. If my vine withers, if my branch withers, as it were, on the vine of Jesus, it's not because of the gardener, it's because I have not remained.

[20 : 45] And if I become useless, Jesus says, I'll cut you off. The danger of slack abiding. The danger of ignoring those signs that show that spiritual indifference and spiritual complacency is taken root and we are letting ourselves go and we are not arresting the decline.

We stop reading the Bible. We stop praying. We stop attending church fellowship on a regular basis. We kind of let ourselves go. There is a very real danger, Jesus says, that you need to arrest it. Wake up. Restore that which remains. Bring it back to life. Like the gardener who is very, unlike me, is very good at gardening. He can buy up a dried plant that's sitting on Sainsbury's shelf too long and has been sold off for 30 pence. I've done that. And he can make it live again with tender, skillful gardening.

But notice there's an invitation here too. Jesus is saying, thankfully, come on, wake up. Wake up. Stop becoming lazy.

[22 : 03] Stop being indifferent. Wake up. And that encourages me because I can beat myself up for being indifferent and lazy and not reading my Bible and praying and everything else. But every so often, I can hear the gentle voice of Jesus saying, come on, I don't want you to be like that.

It's not good for you. Wake up. Strengthen what remains. You can do it. You can do it. Now, you know, if I'm going to do some kind of exercise because I decide I need to look a bit better for my tender age of 62, than I do now.

It's no good getting men's health magazine with 30-somethings in who would just ripple muscles. It's like, you know, fair enough, but I'm never going to look like that. For one thing, they're about six foot two and no amount of exercise is going to make me grow.

So what do I need to do? Well, I need to find a 70-year-old who's turned it around. And I think, wow, come on, I can do it.

Because they have the same kind of adversity and they've overcome it. And that's realistic for me. Yeah? When Jesus says, come on, you can do it, I just feel so encouraged.

[23 : 19] Yeah, I can. Because with him, I can do immeasurably more than anything I ask or imagine. Yeah, I'm aware of my vulnerability and my frailty and my weaknesses, but I'm also grateful for the hope that is always there in Jesus.

Yeah? All right, you've messed up. You've gone wrong. You're not what you ought to be. But you can live again. You can grow again.

You can be the best that I want you to be. Nothing stops you except your own unwillingness to wake up. Nothing stops you except your own unwillingness to wake up.

Isn't that right? Can't blame Jesus if we don't grow. Because everything that we need to grow is given to us. The Holy Spirit is available to us.

The Word of God is there to feed us. Prayer is always available for us. The people of God are here to encourage us. If I do not wake up and I do not take those steps, it isn't because my God and I doesn't care.

[24 : 29] It's because I am not willing to take that step. If Sardis remembers, heeds, and repents, then they will live again.

And that's their encouragement. Jesus puts it in Revelation chapter 3. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.

To him who overcomes, notice the word, to him who overcomes, the one who overcomes his indifference and his laziness, the one who listens out for my voice, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.

Come on, get up. Stop making excuses. Stop putting enough for tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes.

Today is the day to wake up. So we need to examine our spiritual health at this point, don't we? And we might need to do this.

[25 : 31] Repent and restore. Now, repent is a military word. It's a command word, metanoia. It means turn around. Turn around. Turn around.

Stop. Turn around. Or as the sergeant major might say, about turn. Why? Because you're going in the wrong direction. You need to repent and you need to restore that which remains.

Now, it's not a nice word, repent, because it says you've been going wrong. But who's afraid to be told they're going wrong if somebody can tell them that there's a right way to go?

See, we can't just say you're doing it wrong because that encourages nobody, you know, in all of my years as a school teacher, if I just told my students, you've got it wrong again, well, great, but that's not going to in any way improve their knowledge and understanding.

Jesus doesn't just say, stop, you've got it wrong. He also shows us the way we should go. He calls us to a better life, a happier life, a fulfilled life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 47] But perhaps we need to repent. Is there something in your life, as I ask myself, is there something in my life that is proving to be an effective barrier in your relationship with Jesus that keeps you asleep?

Is there something in your life of which you know you need to repent? And is it time to do it?

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. There will be something.

Let me tell you, there will be something. Because even if you sat there and you thought, well, I'm fine. I've got nothing to repent of. There's a word called pride, which is problematic.

And even if you say, well, you know, I never break any of the Ten Commandments. I never commit adultery. There's a word called lust, which Jesus says, if it's happening in your heart, it's just as bad as the action.

[28 : 06] And if you think, well, I would never steal anybody, but I actually, I don't give to the poor, then there's a word called greed. You get my point? This takes depth of searching.

And even if there's just a complacency that says, I think I'm okay. I'm not going to trouble myself too much about this. Then perhaps you really do need to hear the words, wake up.

Repent. Because Jesus has so much more to offer. Notice what he says. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard, obey it and repent.

But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet, he says, you have a few people in Sardis who have not saw their clothes. Just a few, but there are those who have been faithful.

They will walk with me dressed in white for they are worthy. Notice, dressed in white means they will walk with me in holiness of life. Follow after holiness, the writer of the Hebrew says.

[29 : 14] This is not Old Testament. Follow after holiness without which no one will see God. Why? Because if the Holy Spirit lives in us, holiness will be its produce.

what is on the inside comes out in the outside. That's why Jesus says, by their fruits you will recognize them. So a person who is indifferent to holiness is indifferent to the command of Scripture and is indifferent to the desire to worship God in the beauty of holiness.

And if that is you, if that is me, we need to repent. You have a few people who have not yet soiled their clothes. They will walk with me dressed in white for they are worthy.

He who overcomes will like them be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

There's a lot at stake here. The book of life. Now every major city had a book with the name of its citizens written down and if somebody did something that offended the constitution of a city they would have their names removed from the book of life.

[30 : 25] And I know what you're thinking now but surely if you belong to Jesus you cannot lose your salvation. I know you're thinking that and it would take a long time for me to tell you all of the various theological ideas that surround whether you're once saved or was saved and all of that.

And I'm not going to do that now. But if you are wondering that you've missed the point. The point is not shall we have a theological discussion on eternal security.

The point is you should be afraid that your name might be erased from the book of life. That's what should be in your mind at this point. I don't like this warning it makes me uncomfortable.

Good. You should be uncomfortable if you're spiritually indifferent. If you are nearly falling asleep. If everything else matters more to you than Jesus. You should be uncomfortable.

Because what we are reveals itself in what we do. And if we name the name of Jesus we should have a passion and love for him and if we do not we need to question the reality of our salvation.

[31 : 32] That's what Jesus is getting at here. People who are comfortable to sleep have got something deeply wrong with them spiritually. And they need to wake up.

In the end Jesus will save his people. I know that. But I will do all that I can to show that I am worthy to name his name.

I want to walk in white. I want to be dressed in white. I remember that in the Lamb's book of life nothing impure in the city of God nothing impure ever enters in.

And so I want to walk worthy before him. I will therefore repent. and then there's this great promise at the end.

He overcomes will like them be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my father and his angels. Wonderful. You know when we have children or family members of whom we're proud and we introduce them to strangers it's very hard for us not to say do you know what they do?

[32 : 51] Do you know what they've achieved? I have a brother who got an award from the Queen. An OB or an MB I can't remember which one.

He was embarrassed but I was really proud of him. If ever I'm talking about it it's always got this from you know silly isn't it but I do that because I'm proud of him. Aren't you looking forward to the day when Jesus says this is my child look he's dressed in white I'm really proud of him.

He overcame he walked worthy he didn't deny my name when I called upon him to repent he repented modern lifer that's alright it'll get worse until you get switched off you'll be more paddocky he overcomes will be able to switch their phone off and will not blot your name out of the membership list she's my mother-in-law and I'm proud of her she's walk worthy do you have an ear to hear have you been listening this morning has your heart been open to the call of Jesus do you have to wake up and repent can I ask you please to stand in a moment of prayer will you please heed the call of Jesus to wake up to repent and restore your heart in him he is very patient and gracious he's calling to you he's saying look I'm standing at the door of your life and I'm knocking can you hear me

I'm calling your name can you hear me I'm asking you to open the door of your heart to me will you open it I want to come in and be in your life and fix it all up to restore it will you open the door and let me in there is a call here to us all to remain faithful to persevere in righteousness to walk in holiness of life will you commit today Jesus with all of my heart I want to persevere in my walk of faith with you Jesus with all of my heart I want to be holy Jesus with all of my heart I want to walk worthily of you give me your Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit fill my life fill my heart that I might walk worthily before you today

I repent of all of those things that displease you I hate the sins that make you mourn and drive you from me and I call upon you Lord Jesus give me such a desire for holiness that I may love the things you love and hate the things you hate are you ready to renew your commitment to Jesus today or are you ready for the first time to give your commitment to Jesus today to say Jesus I'm tired I'm tired of trying to live my life in my own way by my own strength I'm tired of living a purposeless and hopeless life I want Lord Jesus to live for you to find meaning and hope and healing in you come into my heart

[37 : 22] Lord Jesus there is room in my heart for you thank you Lord Amen