



Sermon Series: The 8th Letter
August 21, 2022
CHRIST FIRST CHURCH

Sermon #4:
The Church at Sardis
Revelation 3:1-6

Pastor Wayne Chasteen

INTRO: Today, let's find our place at Revelation chapter 3. We will begin reading at v 1.

This is the sixth sermon in our series on the seven churches of Revelation. Last week we looked at the letter to the Church in Thyatira. Today we are traveling a little further south to the city of Sardis

OPENING: (PUT UP MAP) Sardis is about 27 miles southeast of Thyatira, and about 60 miles inland from Ephesus. Sardis was one of the oldest and greatest cities of Western Asia. In ancient times, it was a proud and wealthy city, the Capital of the Kingdom of Lydia. The worshipped deity was Cybele, whose form appeared on their coins. Sardis was quite possibly the first ancient city to use a minted currency. Cybele was represented as half human and was commonly associated with a pair of lions. There was also a large temple of Artemis in the city. Large is an understatement, the temple would have dwarfed the Parthenon in ancient Greece. Some think that the local Asiatic goddess, Cybele, identified with the Greek Artemis, and that they are one and the same, but it's unclear.

There were two more notable structures in Sardis. The first was a large complex built in the center of the lower city in the 2nd century AD. It housed a gymnasium and a bathhouse. The complex was over five acres in size. To put that into perspective, that would be about 15 buildings the size of ours. The second was the synagogue of Sardis. It was notable for its size and location. It's one of the largest ancient synagogues ever to be excavated. And it was found in the center of the urban construct of Sardis, instead of on the periphery as synagogues typically were in Gentile cities. This attests to the strength and wealth of the Jewish community in Sardis.

The history of the church that Sardis represents is that of the Reformation, between 1517-1800. We haven't said much about that in this series on the 7 churches. We will come back to this when we get to our verse by verse study of Revelation.

Let's read this letter that Jesus sent to the church in Sardis...

Revelation 3:1-6 *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of the One who holds the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation for being alive, yet you are dead. 2 Wake up and strengthen what remains, which was about to die; for I have found your deeds incomplete in the sight of My God. 3 Remember, then, what you have received and heard. Keep it and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know the hour when I will come upon you. 4 But you do have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and because they are worthy, they will walk with Me in white. 5 Like them, he who overcomes will be dressed in white. And I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and His angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Notice...

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 1a *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:*

These are the words of the One who holds the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..." Here again, Jesus starts by giving a brief, yet profound description of Himself. Remember...

To Ephesus, He described Himself as, *"...Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."*

To Smyrna, He spoke of Himself as, *"...the First and the Last, who died and returned to life."*

To Pergamum, He referred to Himself as, *"...the One who holds the sharp, double-edged sword."*

And to the Church at Thyatira, He said boldly of Himself, I am *"...the Son of God, whose eyes are like a blazing fire and whose feet are like polished bronze."*

Now here in v 1, to the church at Sardis, He tells them, and us, that He *"...holds the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..."* We are familiar with the seven stars. He's been referencing that throughout since chapter 1. The seven stars, also called the 7 angels, are the pastors of the seven churches. Jesus also referenced the seven Spirits of God in Chapter 1, as He led John to introduce himself to the churches. **Ch 1:4-5**

"John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from Him who is and was and is to come, and from the seven Spirits before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."

So what does He mean by the seven Spirits? The beloved Matthew Henry probably offers the best commentary on the phrase. It is certainly the most beautiful explanation.

Matthew Henry "He hath the seven spirits, that is, the Holy Ghost with his various powers, graces, and operations; for he is personally one, though efficaciously various, and may be said here to be seven, which is the number of the churches, and of the angels of the churches, to show that, to every minister, and to every church, there is a dispensation and measure of the Spirit given for them to profit withal, a stock of spiritual influence for that minister and church to improve, both for enlargement and continuance..."

That is so beautifully written, I love Matthew Henry. But to put it simply, it likely means, "the Holy Spirit, sent in all His fullness, to the seven churches." And Jesus states that He is HOLDING the seven Spirits and the seven stars, which speaks of the authority that's been given to Him by the Father.

What an introduction, I love it! Now, let's get into the body of the letter. Notice...

1) THE SAD FACT ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION: v 1b *"I know your deeds; you have a reputation for being alive, yet you are dead."* Here, once again, we have the familiar phrase, I KNOW. Just in case you have forgotten, JESUS KNOWS! He knows our deeds; our good, our bad, the truth about us, He knows what no one else knows! In the case of the church at Sardis, He knew their reputation, but He also knew that their reputation didn't represent who they really were. He said, *"you have a reputation for being alive, yet you are dead."* The Greek verb translated "alive" is the word, *záoō*, which means, active, blessed. One definition ironically, is; to have true life and worthy of the name. THE SARDIANS had made for themselves a good name in the community, but God knew their heart! The church of Sardis was a cavern full of dead men's bones.

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 1a

I) THE SAD FACT ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION: v 1b CONTINUED
“you have a reputation for being alive, yet you are dead.” The word for dead is nekros, which means a lifeless corpse, or it can mean, destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative. SADLY, that describes half or more of the churches in the world today!

GOD FORBID that should ever be said of Christ First Church!

One commentator has said, “Their state is described as—soulless profession—they had a name to live but were dead. It was not scandalous wickedness, but decent death; the form retained, the heart gone; Christ owned in word, ignored in deed; creeds correct, conduct respectable, but life departed.

There are two different kinds of “dead churches”. One is the obvious dead. Most of us have been to a church like this. People drag in and sit down. There’s no rejoicing. There’s no change of format, ever. No moving of the Spirit, shaking things up. At best, it’s boring, at worst, it’s blasphemy. THE OBVIOUS DEAD! Then there’s the OBLIVIOUS DEAD. This church doesn’t know they’re dead. This church is often bustling with activity. They have back to back to back meetings, people coming and going. They are working the programs, every new one that comes along. But listen to me, activity is not an accurate indicator of life! We have enough zombie lovers in here to testify to that. DID YOU KNOW, that the Bible was the first book to ever talk about the LIVING DEAD?

Luke 9:60 “But Jesus said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.””

1 Timothy 5:6 “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

And there are churches that fit into that category. And that’s what Jesus said about this church at Sardis. How sad! That’s the SAD FACT about this CONGREGATION. Now notice...

II) THE SITUATION FACING THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3 “Wake up and strengthen what remains, which is about to die; for I have found your deeds incomplete in the sight of My God. 3 Remember, then, what you have received and heard. Keep it and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know the hour when I will come upon you.” The command to “Wake up”, is in the present imperative, which means to “REMAIN AWAKE”, or be “continually watchful”. The thought here is to keep a vigil, to watch out for ourselves and for one another. And this is the same command that’s given to Christians throughout the New Testament.

You remember when Jesus came to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed to the Father just prior to His arrest and crucifixion. He took with Him, Peter, James and John. The Bible says in **Matthew 26:38-41** “Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” 39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” 40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 1a

I) THE SAD FACT ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION: v 1b

II) THE SITUATION FACING THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3

CONTINUED This was a church that had fallen asleep and was in danger of death. Jesus is sending them a word of warning. *"Wake up and strengthen what remains, which is about to die; for I have found your deeds incomplete in the sight of My God."* This church had started strong. They were founded on right principles, on correct doctrine, and there were those few good elements of faith and practice that remained. But even those things were fading into the dark night of death and decay. Jesus Says, **WAKE UP AND STRENGTHEN** what's about to die. Don't let the embers grow cold. Fan what's left in the hopes of rekindling the flame.

NOTICE, the responsibility lies with the church! Jesus is telling THEM and US to *"wake up and strengthen what remains..."* LISTEN TO ME... God can send revival to whomever He chooses at any time He chooses. But He has chosen that man must meet the conditions of revival to know the move of the Spirit over them.

James 4:7-10 *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."*

Jeremiah 29:12-14 *"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive."*

What concerns me about the church is that, we are always waiting on God to take the initiative to renew the broken fellowship that has come about by our sins. "Oh God, send revival". "Oh God, do this, do that" Like it's God's failure, or His lack of concern that we are in the mess we're in. IT'S NOT GOD'S FAULT. Nor, is it His problem to fix. God has never walked away from His church. He has never pulled back from one of His children. If there's space between us, if there's broken fellowship, if there's silence, it's on us! It's our fault! THAT'S THE REASON God commands us to take action...

vv 2-3 *"Wake up and strengthen what remains, which is about to die; for I have found your deeds incomplete in the sight of My God. 3 Remember, then, what you have received and heard. Keep it and repent. (Now here's the situation that the church is facing) If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know the hour when I will come upon you."*

Coming as a thief always denotes an unexpected judgment. Here, Jesus is giving a choice. The little word "IF" is a word of condition. *"If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief..."* But "IF" you repent, judgment will be spared! **2 Chronicles 7:14** *"IF My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."* **ARE YOU WILLING TO MEET THE CONDITIONS FOR REVIVAL?** If it meant seeing your family get saved, if it meant that your best friend would come to know Christ, would you do whatever it takes to have revival?

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 1a

I) THE SAD FACT ABOUT THIS CONGREGATION: v 1b

II) THE SITUATION FACING THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3 Let me hurry, notice...

III) THE SAVIOR'S FAITHFUL FEW WITHIN THIS CONGREGATION:

vv 4-5 *"But you do have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and because they are worthy, they will walk with Me in white. 5 Like them, he who overcomes will be dressed in white. And I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and His angels."*

"But you do have a few people...who have not soiled their garments..." That's the hope, that there's a few people still left that know how to pray, that can disciple others, and know how to reach the heart of God. God will stay His judgement for even a few. But when there's no one left Judgement comes swiftly.

In Genesis 18 we have the beautiful story of God's willingness and desire to show mercy to mankind. The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah had become so great that God sent three angels to destroy it. When Abraham was told what was about to happen, he pleaded with the Lord to spare the city on account of the righteous people there. He started out by asking God if He would spare the city if 50 righteous people could be found. God agreed. But worried that 50 couldn't be found, he dropped the number to 45, then to 40, then 30, 20, and finally 10. On every account God promised He would not destroy the city if the righteous number could be found. But in the end, it was only Lot and his family that the Lord counted as worthy. They were ushered out of the city and God rained fire from Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them.

The faithful few in Sardis had kept themselves pure. They had avoided the corruption that permeated the culture of that day. No stain of immorality or idolatry soiled their lives. Unlike their slumbering fellow Christians, this faithful few had kept a watchful eye, they had stayed awake, being cautious of anything and anyone that might cause them to stumble and fall into sin. And because of their faithfulness, Jesus had promised, *"...they will walk with Me in white."*

That phrase, *"in white"*, is a glorious thought. It's in contrast to the *"filthy rags"* of our own righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that *"all our self righteous acts, are as filthy rags before God."* Which means, there is no chance that we can save ourselves. We are morally bankrupt and eternally lost and without hope if we are depending on ourselves to get to Heaven. BUT ON THE CROSS, Jesus took our sin upon Himself and purchased our salvation. We have *"been justified by his blood"* and part of that act of justification is an imputation of His own righteousness to us. Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 5:21, *"For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"*.

Jesus is righteous by virtue of His very nature—He is the Son of God. By God's grace, *"through faith in Jesus Christ,"* that righteousness is given *"to all who believe"* Romans 3:21-25 *"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith."* That's imputation: the giving of Christ's righteousness to sinners.

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 1a

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III) THE SAVIOR'S FAITHFUL FEW WITHIN THIS CONGREGATION:

CONTINUED v 5 *"Like them, he who overcomes will be dressed in white. And I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and His angels."*

Here we have the phrase once again, *"he who overcomes..."* And just in case you have forgotten, 1 John 5:4-5 *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"*

For those of us who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, our sins have been forgiven and our sinful past is washed WHITE in the blood of the Lamb! Our names have been written down in the Book of Life, never to be removed.

CONCLUSION: v 6 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* **ARE YOU LISTENING?!!!**