

Session 6 Jesus' Message to the Church of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)

I. THE PRIMARY MESSAGE:

- A. This church was founded about 40 years earlier (AD 52-55) in the revival that swept through Asia (Acts 19). Having a reputation for loving dedication to Jesus, they had become spiritually dead.
- ¹***"To the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ²Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain... ³Remember...how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent... ⁴if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief... ⁵He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and...I will confess his name before My Father..."*** (Rev. 3:1-5)
- B. Sardis was a wealthy city that boasted of being impregnable because of topography suited for military defense. The city of Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele.
- C. Jesus gave no affirmation for their faithfulness. There is no mention of the church in Sardis having external enemies who persecuted them nor of internal enemies in false teachers who promoted immorality (like Pergamos and Thyatira). Their problems (like Laodicea) were self-imposed.

II. JESUS' REVELATION OF HIMSELF

- A. Jesus is He who has the seven Spirits and holds the seven stars.
- ¹***"...These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..."*** (Rev. 3:1)
- B. ***Jesus has the seven stars***: Jesus holds His leaders in His hands to make them bright like a star. To "hold" the seven stars means that He is deeply involved in the lives and hearts of His leaders.
- ²⁰***The seven stars are the angels [messengers/leaders] of the seven churches...*** (Rev. 1:20)
- C. The seven Spirits of God speak of the diverse ministries of the Spirit to them. Jesus will release all seven aspects of the Spirit's ministry to His people that they might have a vibrant life in the Spirit.
- ²***The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*** (Isa. 11:2)

III. JESUS CORRECTED THEM FOR COMPROMISE

- A. They had a reputation of being spiritually alive because of their history of dedication to Jesus.
- ¹***I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead...²I have not found your works perfect [mature] before God.*** (Rev. 3:1-2)
- B. They were born again but lacked their former dedication and devotion to Jesus. Jesus called His people to be perfect (Mt. 5:48)—to seek to walk in *all the light* that the Spirit gives in each season. Jesus was saying that their response to His leadership had not been what it should have been.
- ⁴⁸***Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*** (Mt. 5:48)

IV. EXHORTATION TO RESPOND (WITH A WARNING)

- A. When the Lord warns His people, He also gives a promise of restoration with the warning.
²Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...³Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. (Rev. 3:2-3)
- B. ***Things ready to die:*** This church was in jeopardy of not entering into all that God called them to. Jesus did not find the appropriate response in light of the stewardship that they received. A ministry can thrive numerically and be famous, yet be spiritually dead (without being aware of it).
- C. ***Strengthen the things that remain:*** Leaders do this by *saying* the vision and values often, *modeling* them in their personal lifestyle, and *establishing* them organizationally by insisting on them.
1. ***Say it regularly:*** Leaders are to speak the vision and values often to those in their ministry.
 2. ***Model it consistently:*** Leader are to walk out the values in their personal lifestyle consistently.
 3. ***Establish it organizationally:*** Leaders are only to set other leaders into place who are committed to embracing the vision and values that the Lord confirmed for their ministry.
- D. ***Remember:*** They were to recall *how* and *why* God called them and *what* He promised to do and to remember *how* they once responded in tender love with dedication in the great revival in Acts 19.
1. The call to “remember” is one of the most emphasized exhortations in the Scripture with over 80 references—over 60 in the Old Testament and over 20 in the New Testament.
 2. When we “remember,” then it makes sense to walk out our kingdom commitments. When we “forget,” then we lose sight of many things, become discouraged, and lose motivation.
- E. ***Be watchful:*** Jesus called them to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer, obedience, and encountering Him. The primary exhortation that Jesus gave when teaching on the end times was “to watch and pray” (Mt. 24:42-43; 25:13; 26:38-41; 27:36; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 12:38-39; 21:36; Rev. 16:15).
³³“Watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is...³⁵Watch...for you do not know when the master of the house is coming...³⁷What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mk. 13:33-37)
1. ***Watch:*** This exhortation focuses on the *mind*—to grow in understanding by watching the biblical signs of the times unfold. Increased understanding results in greater urgency.
 2. ***Pray:*** This exhortation focuses on the *heart*—to grow in strength from connecting with Jesus. Prayer strengthens our heart and releases His resources. (Prayers to Strengthen Our Inner Man: https://mikebickle.org/watch/?guid=2015_03_06_1900_FCF_MB).
- F. ***Hold fast:*** To hold fast is to persevere in our love and obedience by responding to temptation with godly attitudes and to be diligent in the work that He gives us. We must refuse to draw back or quit.
- G. ***Repent:*** We realign ourselves to His leadership by making changes in our attitudes, speech, and actions—in the way we spend time and money—so that we follow through on our commitments.

- H. ***I will come upon you:*** Jesus comes to His people three ways—1) He comes to rapture His people when He returns again to earth. 2) He sends angels to come “for us” at the time of our death. 3) He comes to us during this life at strategic times to evaluate our lives and ministries in a way that has real consequences— He comes at key seasons to promote us, prune us, or discipline us.
- I. ***I will come like a thief:*** Jesus is not a thief but compared His coming to being “as a thief.” This is a proverbial expression that indicates that He comes at *unexpected times* and in *ways* that may result in *suffering loss that could have avoided* by those cultivating a lifestyle of watching.
- ³***...if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. (Rev. 3:3)***
1. A thief can be stopped from robbing simply by watching. The lack of watching is what allows a thief to bring loss to one's life because the thief comes unannounced.
 2. The Lord is always present and watching. However, He does not want us to know when He “comes to evaluate” to promote, prune, or discipline us because He wants us to cultivate a lifestyle of responding to Him in love and staying engaged with Him with holy anticipation.
- J. Jesus knew that some had not defiled their garments by spiritual slothfulness and compromise.
- ⁴***You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. (Rev. 3:4)***

V. PROMISE FOR OVERCOMERS: THREE PROMISES

- A. Jesus promised three rewards to this church for those who would overcome spiritual deadness by sustaining a life of watching. These three rewards include our clothing, name, and presentation to God that reflects what we have accomplished in our obedience in this life.
- ⁵***He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev. 3:5)***
- B. ***Clothed in white garments:*** These garments are not the same as the free gift of righteousness. Justification is a gift by faith based on Jesus' worthiness, not ours (Eph. 2:8-9). The many different garments of the saints in the age to come are related to their godly choices in this age (Rev. 19:8).
- ⁸***And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen [worn at the Marriage Supper] is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:8)***
1. There are eight references in the book of Revelation concerning garments in the age to come (Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 16:15; 19:7-8; also see 1 Jn. 2:28; 2 Jn. 7-8).
 2. The word, *white*, speaks of the brightness of their heavenly garments. I believe that believers will have different degrees of brightness with each different type of clothing that will have its unique design, fabric, coloring, and fragrance to reflect one's obedience in this age.
- ⁴¹***There is one glory of the sun...another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:40-42)***
- ⁶***Clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. (Rev. 15:6)***

3. Our garments will be as diverse as the different occasions in which we will participate. For example, a king and a president wear different clothing depending upon the occasion. They wear certain clothing at home, at official banquets, or at military functions with the heads of state. On one occasion they wear garments with their medals, while at others they dress casually, then may wear a suit to go to a wedding. Every occasion requires different garments.
 4. The priestly garments in OT give us insight into the value that God has on garments and how they speak of spiritual things. God designed them to be beautiful and to show forth His glory. There were distinct parts of these garments (coat, girdle, bonnet, robe, ephod, breastplate, tunic, turban hats, sash, and crowns (Ex. 28:1-43; Zech. 6:12).
²You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty...
³Make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest.
⁴And these are the garments...a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash...⁴⁰make hats...for glory and beauty... (Ex. 28:2-4, 40)
- C. ***I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life:*** A person's name before God is associated with their actions and honor. Most cities at that time had a city registrar which included a record of the conduct of its citizens—it included paying taxes, noble accomplishments, crimes committed, etc.
1. The books in heaven contain vast information about our lives, including our words and deeds.
¹⁶Those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened...so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD... (Mal. 3:16)
 2. Jesus is promising not to blot out the “record of the remembrance” of their righteous deeds if they repent from their spiritual deadness and walk in diligence as they had in their past.
 3. ***Principle:*** Our good deeds are recorded in heaven but are blotted out if we turn from them. Ezekiel taught that a righteous man who turns from his righteousness would die. This gives us insight into how God “remembers and forgets.” God remembers the good that His people continue in, but He “forgets” the good that they turn from (Ezek. 3:20; 18:24; 33:13, 20).
²⁴When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity...all the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered... (Ezek. 18:24)
 4. Eternal rewards, crowns, and potential full rewards can be lost.
¹¹I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)
¹⁴If anyone's work...endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:14-15)
⁸Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully (2 Jn. 8; NIV)
- D. ***I will confess his name before My Father:*** This is not a reference to being saved but to the reward of Jesus telling the story of your love and dedication to the Father many times throughout eternity.
²¹His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Mt. 25:21)