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Revelation 3:1–6 NASB 2020

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and *yet* you are dead. Be constantly alert, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Intro

Author: The one who has...

- The seven spirits
 - The perfect witness of the Holy Spirit to His churches
- The seven stars
 - The whole angelic host sent to minister to His church.

Recipients: The church in Sardis.

- Sardis was a very wealthy community. It is believed by many scholars that Sardis was the first place in the world where gold and silver coins were minted and the place where the art of wool dyeing was invented. By the time of the Roman Empire, Sardis had been in decline for some time but it retained great wealth and a prominent temple to Artemis (the

Greek goddess of hunting, childbirth, and child rearing among other things). Once the capital city of the Persian Empire, Sardis had been conquered by many cultures and by the time John was writing this letter.

- The city of Sardis was made up of two parts. It had an older upper city which was tucked into a mountainous area and surrounded by natural rock walls. The lower city was built in a valley just below the older part.
- The people would retreat into the older city anytime there was an attack. Throughout the city's history the people basically viewed their city as impregnable because of the natural rock walls.

Occasion: To warn the church that Jesus will not tolerate fake religion, but will reward genuine faith.

Truth

I. Many churches look alive but are dead (1)

1. The church in Sardis clearly had a strong reputation based on their looking very good and pious to everyone around them.
 - a. Jesus sees right through our veneer and so He can see whether the heart of a church is really for Him.
 - b. The people of Sardis had clearly been influenced by the pagan culture and the materialism all around them.
 - i. Note that Sardis was not accused of any particular heresy, and yet their word from the Lord is the harshest yet. Jesus has no room for hypocrisy in His church.
 - ii. The goal of Christian faith is transcendence through union with Christ. If all we do is give Jesus lip service with no real intent on being transformed into His image, we aren't much of a church.
 - c. In Sardis, wealth and the worship of material things had led them into deep moral decay.
 - i. Similarly, America is a very wealthy nation which is also in decline partially due to the fact that we have made the material world (what Jesus called mammon) into a god which we worship.

- ii. We Americans attempt to commodify everything these days; from celebrities, to our possessions, to sex, and our own bodies.
 - 1. This has led to a horribly destructive pattern in which we think of no one but ourselves. We avoid thinking about how our actions might affect family, friends, or the greater culture. We live by the mantra, "you do you" and our moral fabric is unraveling in front of our eyes every time we participate in this.
- 2. In our culture today I see two specific ways churches fall into the pattern of Sardis.
 - a. Some churches have great doctrine, but little in the way of good works.
 - i. These often look like good conservative churches, but they are a mere shell that looks good on the outside.
 - ii. Often people in these churches know a lot about the Bible, but their lives are relatively untouched by what the Bible teaches.

Matthew 15:7–9 NASB 2020

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you, by saying:

'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,

BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

'AND IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,

TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.' "

John 5:39–40 NASB 2020

"You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those *very Scriptures* that testify about Me; and *yet* you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

- 1. Some common characteristics of this type of church are a snootiness towards outsiders, lack of compassion for the poor, and responding with condemnation rather than compassion towards sinners.

2. Often these people value truth rightly, but they do not value people rightly which proves their lack of true devotion to a Christ who brought Himself low to raise sinners up to Himself.
- iii. This sort of church is dead not because of its beliefs, but because it lacks a true heart for Jesus.
 1. This is what Jesus' big problem with the Pharisees was.
 2. The remedy for this church is to repent of pride and self-reliance, setting Christ back in His proper place as Lord rather than ourselves.
- b. Some churches have good works, but trash doctrine.
 - i. These churches will often look like good liberal churches.
 - ii. They often know little of the Bible and what they do know, they twist to align with the world's values rather than repenting and embracing Christ's virtues. However, they generally know it is important to be kind to people.
 1. They are often kind to a fault but are very judgemental towards those who hold firmly to historic Christian doctrine or to conservative beliefs, viewing traditional Christians as rigid, bigoted, and behind the times.
 2. They often believe that the most important thing to do is to serve the socially downcast, the poor, minorities, and the oppressed.
 - iii. This sort of church is dead because though it does many good things, it does not hold firm to the message and teaching of Christ laid out in Scripture and in the historic teachings of the church.
 1. In these churches people are rarely or never called to repent of sin and sin may even be celebrated.
 2. This sort of church loves people straight into hell and would likely throw Jesus out for being too judgemental if He were in their midst.
 3. The solution for this sort of church is to repent of making people and cultural sensibilities their god and to return to the

pure teachings of Christ.

II. Jesus wants holistic allegiance, not partial (2-3)

1. Incomplete deeds will not be accepted by the Lord.
 - a. Jesus wants a church with sound doctrine rooted in Him coupled with vibrant life rooted in His word.
 - b. Doctrine and works are not an either/or, but a both/and.

John 14:15 NASB 2020

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Luke 11:42 NASB 2020

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint, rue, and every *kind of* garden herb, and *yet* you ignore justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

- i. Syncretizing our faith with our culture will not do, nor will having a shell of doctrine with no real heart.
2. We are to keep every aspect of Christ's teaching, not only the part that resonates with us.
 - a. It comes down to a question as to who is truly Lord of our lives.
 - i. If Christ is Lord then we will follow Him in every way.
 - ii. If we are lord then we will follow our whims and call that Christian.
3. If we do not repent of our incomplete works, Christ will come against us.
 - a. He told the church in Sardis that He would come like a thief, which is something that would have resonated with them.
 - i. Twice Sardis had been conquered by armies who snuck soldiers into their city by climbing up their walls and then opening up the gates for their armies to rush in.
 - ii. Christ is clearly letting this church know that their security is false and that if they don't repent, He will breach their walls and bring them down.

- b. The American church needs to heed this warning, as we bear many similarities with the church in Sardis.
 - i. I believe many American Christians have a false sense of security. We think we are good with Jesus because we made a profession of faith and were baptised, but our lives are often spiritually bankrupt.

2 Timothy 3:1–8 NASB 2020

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; avoid *such people as* these. For among them are those who slip into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, worthless in regard to the faith.

Matthew 7:21–23 NASB 2020

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; LEAVE ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

- c. Jesus calls this church to strengthen what remains, and that is an encouraging word.
 - i. We are being called to return to the Gospel we received from the beginning rather than living in the compromised version we may have fallen into.
 - ii. We are called to keep the faith handed down to us by Christ.
 - 1. This is clearly active rather than passive as many treat it.

Galatians 5:16 NASB 2020

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- a. The Holy Spirit is gifted to every Christian, but we must choose whether we will follow His voice or not.
- iii. We must learn to repent quickly when we get off track.
 - 1. The truth is that we all struggle to remain in Christ, but He has given us grace to do so.
 - 2. Our job is simply to trust in Christ, center our lives on Him, and run away from sin and towards Christ whenever it is exposed in our lives.

1 Corinthians 10:13 NASB 2020

No temptation has overtaken you except *something* common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

III. Overcomers will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ (4-6)

- 1. Christ wants us clothed in His purity rather than in the taint of sin.
 - a. Those who are not actively soiling themselves in participation with sin are called worthy by Christ Himself. How wonderful is that!
 - b. Christ says these will walk in white (purity) with Him.
- 2. Our ultimate outcome is not a matter of earning, but of receiving from Christ.
 - a. Interestingly, the church in Sardis (and many American churches too) seems predominantly focused on outward appearance and how they perform before others with little concern for the inner life of the Spirit working in them.
 - b. By contrast Christ makes it clear that His church will not be know for their own righteousness so much as they are known for being clothed

in the righteousness of Christ.

- c. Those who overcome by grace through faith in Christ will be clothed by Christ Himself, will be honored by Christ before His Father, and are cemented into His book of life forever.
- d. How do we overcome?

Revelation 12:11 NASB 2020

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life *even* when faced with death.

3. Don't miss what Jesus is saying!

Revelation 3:6 NASB 2020

The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

- a. If you are able to hear and receive this from the Lord, know that it is He who has given you this ability by His grace. If He has given you this grace, He intends to empower you to walk it out so don't miss out on what He is calling you to do.

1 Corinthians 2:16 NASB 2020

FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

Gospel

Every one of us is either dead or a formerly dead person who is made alive in Christ by grace through faith.

Who is God? He is the Lord who has sent His Holy Spirit to us and has command of the host of heaven.

What has God done? He has commanded us to reject the false appearance of religion and to embrace a life centered upon our faith in Christ alone.

Who are we? We are the people whom Christ died to redeem and restore to Himself, and who Christ intends to clothe with His righteousness if we hold fast to our faith in Him.

What will we do? We will fight the temptation to be casual Christians and do everything we can to take hold of the life Christ has won for us; being sure that we are living lives which are rooted in Christ and bring glory to His name.

Challenge

Philippians 3:7–11 NASB 2020

But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *mere* rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

I would challenge us to embrace the posture of the Apostle Paul for our lives.

Whatever might keep us from living lives centered on Christ must be treated as a mortal enemy.

What does it look like to center our lives on Christ daily?

- To set Christ up as Lord in our hearts, preferring Him over everyone and everything else in our lives.
- To have daily habits of prayer and engaging the Bible.
- To walk in the fulness of the Spirit as the Lord has intended for us.
- To love our families and neighbors well.
- To dedicate ourselves to Christ's community where we are called.
- To reach out to others with the gospel of Jesus.