

The Dead Church

Revelation 3:1-6

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Review: Rev 2:18-29 – The Corrupt Church

- Our inclination to be tactful and accepting can cause us to fall into sin.
- The Lord will discipline those He loves allowing the consequences of sin to chasten us.
- Even as God's wrath is aroused by sin and the toleration of sin, His ultimate purpose is repentance.

Revelation 3:1 – The character of the city of Sardis.

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

What do we know about Sardis?

At the time Jesus spoke these words to John, the ancient city of **Sardis** had seen its best days and had started to decline. Yet it was a wealthy city, situated at the junction of several important roads and trade routes.

- the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor was minted in Sardis about 550 BC. Sardis was the place where modern money was born.

Sardis was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a reputation for apathy and immorality.

- Sardis had a temple to the mother goddess, Cybele who was worshipped with all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.

The people of Sardis were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of decadence.

To what end did the decadent living of Sardis lead?

It led to the doom of **Sardis** on a few different occasions. The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of the fall of Sardis in days of Cyrus...

549 BC – King Cyrus found the position of the city ideally suited for defense. There seemed to be no way to scale the steep cliff walls surrounding the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city. One soldier studied the problem carefully, and as he looked, he saw a soldier defending Sardis drop his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a

hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops up it that night. They easily climbed the cliffs, came to the actual city walls and found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defenses of their city they felt no need to keep a diligent watch, so the city was easily conquered.

Curiously, the same thing happened almost 200 years later when Antiochus attacked and conquered the overconfident city that didn't set a watch.

How did Jesus describe Himself to the Sardis church?

He used terms that emphasized His character as the Master of every spiritual power and authority.

What does the repetition of the number seven tell us?

Seven is the number of *completeness* in the Bible.

- Jesus holds the fullness of the Spirit of God, and the fullness of the church.
- Jesus **has** the Holy Spirit in fullness to give to the Church.

How do we know the stars represent the church?

Because of what Jesus said in Revelation 1:20: *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches*, and through these letters, when Jesus speaks to the *angels of the seven churches*, He speaks not to one individual, but to the entire church through that individual.

What does it mean they had name that they are alive?

Jesus knew the church at Sardis had a *reputation* of life and vitality. The church of Sardis, like the city of Sardis, seemed alive and good.

What did Jesus have *against* the church at Sardis?

But you are dead: Despite their reputation of life, Jesus saw them for what they really were. A good reputation is no guarantee of true spiritual character.

What does it tell us that the church at Sardis was dead?

This indicates no struggle, no fight, no persecution. It wasn't that the church at Sardis was *losing* the battle. A **dead** body has *lost* the battle, and the fight seems over.

Why wasn't there any persecution at Sardis?

Being **dead**, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan's domain, so it wasn't worth attacking.

- Sardis was a perfect model of inoffensive Christianity
- The church of Sardis was at peace; but it was the peace of the dead.

Rev 3:2-4 – What Jesus wants the Sardis church to do.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember 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. 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.

About what should the Sardis church be watchful?

They needed to examine and protect, strengthening what they have. *The things which remain* tells us that though the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis was bad, it wasn't hopeless.

- Spiritually, there were **things which remain** that could be strengthened.
- Jesus had not given up on them, and though it was late (**that are ready to die**) it was not *too* late.

How did the history of Sardis reflect the church's problem?

In its history, the city of Sardis was easily conquered twice before. It wasn't that the attacking armies overwhelmed Sardis, but because overconfidence made them stop being **watchful**.

- The spiritual state of the church in Sardis was a reflection of the city's historical character.

What does it mean that Jesus had not found their works to be perfect before God?

This shows that their **works**, though present, had not measured up to God's standard. The *presence* of **works** isn't enough because God requires a particular intent and purpose in all of our **works**.

- God knows our motives... they should be done with a heart and in a manner that show them to be **perfect before God**.

What steps did Jesus give them to restore their relationship with Him?

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent: What they must do was to **remember** how they first **received and heard** the Word of God.

- Then they must **hold fast** to those things, and **repent** by turning and restoring the gospel and apostolic doctrine to authority over their lives.

What would be the consequence if the church at Sardis did not watch?

if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief: If they ignored His command to **be watchful**, then Jesus would come upon them **as a thief**, at a time completely unexpected.

How would Jesus come upon them?

He could **come** in the sense bringing immediate judgment. Or, He could **come** in the sense of His coming at the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

- Used in either sense, it showed He might come suddenly and unannounced, so they must **be watchful**.

What does it tell us there were a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments?

Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a **few names**.

- In Pergamos and Thyatira there were a few bad among the good; in Sardis there were **a few** good among the bad.

What was remarkable about the few who were faithful to the Lord?

Because of the city's notoriously immoral reputation.

- **Even** in a city that wicked, some among the Christians had not defiled themselves by joining in sin.

What does it mean this loyal few had not defiled their garments?

Jesus referred to **defiled garments** because He gives His people white garments.

- As sin is expressed under the notion of nakedness, so holiness is expressed under the notion of a garment.

And they shall walk with Me in white: Jesus also promised that these pure ones would **walk with Me**.

- This picture of close fellowship and friendship is seen in Enoch, who *walked with God; and he was not, for God took him* (Genesis 5:24).

Revelation 3:5 – A promise of a reward.

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.

Who were the overcomers at the Sardis church?

Jesus identified the overcomers with those *few names* who have not *defiled their garments* (Rev 3:4). These would wear **white garments**, received from Jesus.

What was the difference between the dead with imperfect works and the *few names* who pleased God?

It was *purity*, and the closeness with Jesus that is always related to purity.

- The deadness and spiritual facade of most of the Christians in Sardis was related to their impure lives, their embrace of the sin of the world around them. It's hard to say if the deadness came before the impurity or the impurity came before the deadness, but they were surely related.

Jesus explained the absolute necessity of this being clothed by God with His garments of purity and righteousness in His parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:11-14).

- Real righteousness is receiving God's covering instead of trying to cover ourselves.
- Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice.

What does it mean the names of the overcomers would not be blotted from the Book of Life?

Overcomers are assured of their heavenly citizenship.

- In the ancient world, death or a criminal conviction could **blot out** the name of an ancient citizen from the city's book of the living, which was the city register.

Does being blotted out from the Book of Life mean that people can lose their salvation?

The focus of the context here is *assurance*, so we should not think that names are being constantly erased and then rewritten.

What is the Book of Life?

It is a record that will be opened and referenced at the Great White Throne Judgement. This means that the Book of Life is *real*, and will be *read*...

Revelation 20:12 – *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*

The **Book of Life** determines if we go to heaven or hell. *And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:15). Knowing our names are written in the Book of Life should bring us great joy...

Luke 10:20 – *Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

Why should we take it seriously that our names could be blotted out of the Book of Life?

There are five different references to people being blotted out of the book...

- Moses said to the Lord: *Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.* (Exodus 32:32)
- *And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."* (Exodus 32:33)
- *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.* (Psalm 69:28)
- *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.* (Revelation 3:5)
- *And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.* (Rev 22:19)

This means that the *idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously.*

Could blotting out be symbolic and the person's name was never there to begin with?

That could be the case, but even so, the Lord still wants us to take it seriously, because there are some who by every human appearance are saved, yet will not be in heaven.

Matthew 7:21-23 – *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

Even those who do great things in the name of Jesus will not go to heaven if they were not genuinely saved. The key to have a relationship (*I never knew you*).

- Not all professors of faith in Christ are possessors of that faith

How can we be sure our name is in the Book of Life?

By being born again, born from above of Jesus Christ (John 3:3-7). And we can know we have been born again:

1 John 5:1 – *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*

Children of God love Jesus because they know He is the one who made it possible for our sins to be forgiven... and they also love their fellow Christians.

Can a true born-again Christian lose their salvation?

No, eternal security is a solid biblical doctrine.

- Salvation is the gift of God, and God's gifts are "irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).
- A Christian cannot be un-born again.
- The redeemed cannot be unpurchased.
- Eternal life cannot be temporary.
- God cannot renege on His Word & He does not lie (Titus 1:2).

If you believe your performance has any bearing on your salvation, you are trusting in your works for salvation.

What does it tell us that Jesus will confess the names of the overcomers before the Father and His angels?

This is an amazing promise. It simply makes sense that we should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, but it is amazing that He would not be ashamed to confess us!

- It is important for us to accept Jesus. But it is far more important to know if Jesus accepts us.

Revelation 3:6 – An exhortation to all who will hear.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

How does the message to the Sardis church apply to us?

It is easy to drift in sleepy apathy towards spiritual death, especially when you have a good reputation.

- Still, there is always hope for the dead church because Jesus knows how to raise the dead.

Sardis teaches us that we must beware of our success. The city was wealthy and knew easy living, but it made them soft and spoiled.

- Sardis also teaches us that we be watchful at our strongest points. Sardis thought it was unconquerable, and so it was conquered.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- Beware of getting complacent because of a good reputation; this should make us more diligent.
- The Lord always has His remnant; be a part of the remnant!
- Overcomers have eternal security.