

Revelation 3:1-6
 Church in Sardis
 A Church Autopsy
 Study 12

3 “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. **2** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.[a] **3** 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. **4** You[b] 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. **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. **6** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’”

One of the most famous stars in all the skies is the famed Northern Star. Often times called the North Star or Pole Star. It’s also known as Polaris

- It’s the star that has been used by man for centuries to identify true north
 - and is the point around which the entire Northern Sky rotates
 - Here’s a picture of it
 - And, just for educational purposes, you can find it in the sky as the last star in the handle of Ursa Minor, or “Little Dipper”
- That aside, modern day astronomers have estimated that the light of this star has taken 323 light years to reach us
 - That means astronomers estimate the light of this star takes around 323 years to reach the earth and be visible to our eyes

Something interesting to ponder about when talking about the light years of this star,

- Is that this star could have plunged into darkness and died 323 years ago
 - Yet the light would still be pouring down to earth
- The North Star could have burned out 300 years ago
 - But we wouldn’t know it for another 23 years
 - Polaris could be shining on earth as brightly as ever as if nothing had happened

- It could be a dead star shining solely by the light of it's brilliant past (*adapted from John Phillips – Exploring Revelation*)

This is the church in Sardis.

- It had a name that suggested it was alive; but in fact, as Jesus calls the church, it was 'dead'.
 - To illustrate another way, the church in Sardis was like a flower in a vase.
 - Having all the brilliant look of life and vivaciousness
 - Beautiful in color and fragrant in aroma
 - But in reality – it is dead

I believe it's fair to say that there are churches today that are in the same shape as Sardis.

- They have a name and reputation that they are alive–
 - Vibrant activity in the church, plentiful programs happening, outreaches in the community
 - But Jesus – as the Great Physician – has His finger on their pulse and He knows there is no life.
 - He knows they are dead.
- I believe it's equally as fair to say that, today, Jesus has His finger on the pulse of Calvary Chapel Monroe as well
 - Watching; caring; keeping His finger on the pulse of the church as it were
 - Keeping the pulse strong. Making sure our pulse does not weaken or fail

But the overall application of this passage doesn't just stop at the entity of the church – this letter written to Sardis, is a message to the individuals of the church as well

- Verse 6 tells us "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"
 - This is a message for many people in the church today
 - Maybe this message directly speaks to you.
- This message is for those that have an appearance of the Christian life, but inwardly they may be dead
 - This is a message for those that may have had a great testimony and great spiritual life at one time
 - But now it's just blah.

- What was once an intentional passionate life for Christ,
 - Has been replaced by a dispassionate indifference to the things of God
- This passage gives great insight and practical application for all believers
 - And this morning, the Lord will perform what has been called a **Church Autopsy** on Sardis

Jesus begins His letter with an address: “**3** “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,”

- There are just a few things we should know about the city of Sardis
 - that will help us understand the letter and the imagery that Jesus uses
- First, Sardis originally sat atop an acropolis.
 - It was on a steep mountain with cliffs on three sides falling straight down from the wall
 - Making the city an easily defended city
 - But even with it’s ideal situation, the city was conquered three times –
 - Each because of an over confidence and a lack of watchfulness
- It was conquered in 549BC by Cyrus of Persia and by Antiochus the Great in 214BC. It was also later overtaken by the Romans as well
 - Each time it was captured, it was taken by surprise.
 - On one occasion, when Cyrus conquered the city, one of Cyrus’ soldiers watched a soldier in Sardis drop his helmet to the bottom of the cliff
 - He watched as this soldier made his way off the cliff, retrieve his helmet and make his way back up
 - This soldier concluded that the cliff was negotiable at that point and so that night he led a party of Persian soldier up the same way
 - When they reached the top, they found the battlements unguarded
 - Apparently the Sardians thought themselves too safe to need a guard
 - The city was caught off guard and was surprised and conquered
- Sadly, the same thing happened with Antiochus and the Roman conquer
 - All three times the Sardians lost their city because they were too complacent to watch

- Interesting that Jesus warns this church to be “watchful...if you will not be watched, I will come upon you as a thief”
 - The Lord was using the city as an illustration to the church of its true spiritual condition

3 “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:”

- Jesus here address the church by name and by introducing Himself as “He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars”
 - You may remember these descriptions from chapter 1:4 and from 1:20
 - The seven spirits of God could be a reference to the Holy Spirit
 - or to the seven angels that Jesus is using to do His bidding here in this book
 - And of course the seven stars are the seven angels (or pastors) of the churches Jesus is here writing to
- But the emphasis I think Jesus is making here is that He has them.
 - When we read “He who has” – this is the word <echo> and carries with it a tone of possession. It’s one of ownership and authority.
 - He is revealing Himself as the Master and by inference, the church are subject
 - Jesus is saying He is the One who has everything the church needs.
 - Very timely to a church who has been relying upon themselves

Jesus says “I know your works”

- We see this phrase in each letter and each time it’s used what follows is usually something good
 - Like in Ephesus where HE says “ I know your works, your labor, your patience..”
 - It’s usually followed by a commendation
- Yet here in Sardis, it doesn’t carry the same connotation because what follows isn’t a commendation
 - But rather a criticism. A concern
 - He does the same with the last church in Laodicea
- Here the Lord said “I know your works” and in verse 2 He knows their works to not be perfect.”

- There's something wrong.
- This word "perfect" is not the Greek word <teleia> - which speaks of an absolute perfection
 - But it comes from a Greek word indicating works previously prepared and appointed, but having been left unfulfilled
 - Like we see in Eph. 2: "**10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in"
 - They're going through the motions, but the motions are unfruitful in God's eyes.

That's interesting isn't it?

- Churches and Christians can be so busy working for God, but yet be very sterile spiritually
 - Christians can be serving the Lord and very busy going through the mechanics
 - But inside you are dry and empty, and in need of a touch from God
- You know, the truth about every church and about every Christian is known fully only by the Lord.
 - There is nothing hidden from His sight or His understanding

And so the Lord criticizes this church saying, "I know your work, that you have a name that you are alive but you are dead"

- We see this type of death in the illustration of the Prodigal Son's return
 - Luke 15: **22** "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. **23** And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; **24** for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."
 - I've always loved that story, because even though the Father speak of a death
 - He is always called a son.
 - It's a relational aspect; not a familial aspect.
 - Like you with your father – you can never NOT be a son (or daughter)
 - But your relationship can have the stench of death
 - The *activity* of a fellowship can often be mistaken as an indication of life.
 - Scripture makes it plain that works and activity in and of themselves

are no reliable indicator of spiritual life

- It is possible for an active fellowship to be comprised of the “living dead”
 - As one said: “Go throughout Christendom . . . and you will often find the Gospel in a coffin.”

The church in Sardis had a great PR department and good advertising; but they were dead.

- And I would say that today, the church in general has a problem putting reputation before godly character and a holy life
 - Wanting to look good to keep in step with the culture or whatever. To have a certain type of reputation in the community
 - But there can be a danger in if we aren’t putting the main things first
 - Godliness, repentance, holy living, seeking first God’s kingdom
- You know, reputation is what others say we are; character is what God knows us to be (*Hocking*)
 - And godly character is built around this: “**33** Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” – Luke 17:33
 - Sardis was seeking to preserve the life that they once had. The reputation they once built
 - But never sought to abandon that for the sake of godliness
- Saints of God- let us seek a godly life over preserving our reputation.
 - This will keep us from being autopsied by Jesus

So Jesus starts by criticizing the church and then challenges them in order to bring back life.

- There are 6 ways in which Jesus challenges the church
 - And if you are here today and you are listening to the Spirit of God speak to you on these matters
 - If you are concerned that your life might align with that of the believers in Sardis
- That you are empty; spiritually barren;
 - Active in the church and going through the mechanic
 - But you know that God is speaking to you and revealing that you are in danger of being pronounced dead by Jesus
 - These 6 challenges are essential for you. Listen and

take notes

First challenge – Verse 2 “Be watchful!”

- The Greek word <gregoreuo> is in the present tense imperative.
 - The imperative indicates a command and the present tense gives a continual motion
 - It means “you be continually watching”; To be continually on guard. Never let down your guard.
- Some bibles translate this as “Wake up!” – like a slap to the face or being doused with ice water when sleeping! Wake up!
 - But really this is not merely the call to be awake; it is to remain awake,
 - To keep watch like a watchman in the midst of a sleeping encampment
 - Luke 21: **34** “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing (*referring to the hangover from being drunk*), drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. **35** For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **36** Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The second challenge – “**2** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die”

- First, we are challenged to be always alert to the dangers that face us
 - The **second challenge** Jesus gives is one of rebuilding “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die”
- The church in Saris were doing all the things they ought to be doing – the works that should remain.
 - They were teaching the Word, worshipping the Lord, baptizing converts, sharing the Lord’s table.
 - But they were only doing them as an empty shell with no spiritual life
 - Jesus’ challenge is to strengthen those things

What’s HE saying? I believe it’s simply this – Go back to the basics and rebuild on the things that matter.

- This word ‘strengthen’ is a word we use a lot in English – it’s the word <sterizo>
 - Sound familiar?
 - It’s where we get our English word ‘Steriod’
- Fourteen times we see this word used in the bible
 - “**31** And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.”
 - James 5: **8** You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand”
 - 1 Pet 5: **10** But may[a] the God of all grace, who called us[b] to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*”

For those who have become apathetic to the things of God.

- Those who were once on fire for God but now there is barely an ember
 - What is the challenge Jesus gives to this man?
 - First, be on guard. Be always watchful of the dangers to your spiritual walk
 - And second – strengthen yourself in the basics. Give a steroid injection to those things that matter spiritually.
- What are those things?
 - C’mon! You all know. We preach the basics here all the time
 - Get back into His word. Get back to talking with Him regularly.
 - Be intentional with your relationship with Him
- I think sometimes we get paralyzed by all the things we think we ought to be doing for Christ
 - But in that feat, we can sometimes become weak and become lost – or dead, as Jesus says.
 - In our relationship with our precious Father. We lose our joy; diminish in our faith
- And Jesus is saying “The basics are getting ready to die - get back to them and strengthen them. Stop worrying about the rest”
 - Seek first the kingdom of God
 - Get back to His word; Get back to prayer and dependency on the Holy Spirit

And Jesus says (#3) **remember!** - verse 3 “Remember therefore how you have received and heard”

- This is the same message to the first church in chapter 2: **5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works”
 - It’s so easy to rest upon what was – who we used to be in Christ. How on fire we first were in Jesus when we first came to him
 - And in doing so we never grow beyond infancy and be useful to the Master

One of the first things that happened to the Prodigal son on his way back home

- The Bible says that “...when he came to himself (he remembered), he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,” (Luke 15:17,18)
 - We would be good to take this example and remember the goodness of the Father
 - and turn back to Him in our time of spiritual apathy
- We so easily forget our first love. How passionate we were about Him.
 - We forget how spending time talking to Him was the best thing in the world
 - We forget how reading Him word and discovering the greatest of God was all we sought after
- Remember, dear dead Christian.
 - Remember how you received His gospel in with such a longing and unmatched craving
 - Remember how you first heard the message of Jesus with a childlike faith

And **hold fast!** (#4). We talked much about this last week. Holding fast

- Hold fast to your loyalty to Christ and your faithfulness to God and His word
 - **And repent** (#5).
 - I find it very interesting that every church Jesus writes to – except the persecuted church of Smyrna and the faithful church of Philadelphia
 - For the exception of those two, Jesus tells every church to repent
- I know I’ve said it many times before, but repentance is such a gift

- Josh Kauz and I were talking about this a bit this last Friday
 - How many churches aren't preaching repentance or that many think that repentance is only for the non-Christian
 - But Jesus tells almost every church – and therefore every Christian within those churches
 - To repent
- When the things of God are allowed to die, the only recourse the church has is repentance
 - A church, as well as individual Christians, stay healthy when they have an active life of repentance
 - Do you want the most robust, healthy, vibrant Christian life and walk with Jesus?
 - Practice daily, often repentance.

Jesus lays a challenge to the dead church – to the dead Christian

- To be watchful,
 - To strengthen themselves in the basics of their faith
 - To remember and not forget how they first heard and received the gospel
 - And to hold fast and repent of their sins
- And the last challenge given to here is to realize.
 - Realize the consequences you face if you do not repent
 - Last part of verse 3 "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."
 - This illustration must have struck such a cord with the people in Sardis

Just like the city of Sardis who was failed in their faithful duty of being watchful and therefore captured by surprise – multiple times

- So too, the unrepentant Christian who remains apathetic to the ways of God
 - Will reap the consequences of Jesus coming to them when they do not expect.
- He's not talking about the 2nd coming here
 - He's talking about the removal the influence of the church and of the believer
 - It's not a message of joy and anticipation for the believer
 - It is a message of warning.

This is the criticism and concern of Jesus about this church.

- Let's finish up with the compassion of Jesus in the last verses. So glad this ends on a positive note
 - Verse 4 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments;"
 - As compassionate as this is, and even in the comfort Jesus offers to this church
 - There is a sadness when we read that there are only a few who are walking well
 - It's seems that in this church that had such a great reputation in the community
 - There are only a few left who have not defiled their garments
- "Not defiled their garments".
 - This is a description of those that were saved but had soiled their robes
 - And picked up defilement on their way to heaven
 - How do I know this?
- Think about this for a moment.
 - If you are unsaved, your garments are already filthy rags
 - Only someone who is saved can be described as soiling an otherwise clean robe.
 - Make sense?
- The church that had such a great name among men was largely defiled.
 - Of course, we think immediately of various sins that would soil them.
 - But we should expand our understanding of what defiles us to include anything that is not appropriate to a Spirit filled and faith filled life
 - For it is impossible to please the Lord without faith – amen?

These that have not soiled their already white garments are given **three** promises:

- **First**, in verse 4, the promise of walking with Christ in white because they are worthy
 - Rev 19: 6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the[d] Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb

has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”

- **8** And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”
- This notion of worthiness spoken of here is not in the sense that might think it today
 - The word is one that speaks to a personal and practical walk of righteousness
 - We see it spoken of in Eph. 4: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”
- This worthiness is not speaking of salvation or being justified before God
 - That is a free gift of God given through faith in the finished work of the cross
 - That worthiness is based on Christ’s worthiness and never our own
- But this worthy written about here in verse 4 is directly connected to verse 5
 - And is given as a reward for a worthy walk and linked to the overcomer

The **second** promise - **5** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and ***I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life;***

- Listen to that assurance! The overcomers will be clothed in white garments, walk with Jesus
 - And never have his name blotted out from the book of Life
- It’s sad that many have mangled this promise by saying something like
 - “Since Jesus says that He will not blot the overcomers name from the book of life
 - That means that He ***will*** blot some from the book.
 - Meaning that they were written in there before and He will blot them out

We need to be careful not to read into a text that which it does not say.

- The point of our Lord here is to encourage the believer of their safekeeping in Him and their security in their eternal home
 - The text plainly says He will not blot their names.
 - It **DOES NOT** say that He will blot names out – it only says that He won’t.
- To impose anything else on the text is dishonest

- And in my view, reveals a presupposition in a person's theology;
 - Placing an assumption based on a bias
 - rather than having a conviction based on the plain rendering of the text.
- If we want to extrapolate an application point from this text
 - It's not the assumption that He will blot some out
 - The application point comes when we consider whether our names are written in it to begin with.
 - That what we should be concerned with.
- This is the warning of the book of Revelation
 - Rev. 13:8 "All who dwell on the earth will worship him (that is the beast), whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."
 - 17: 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is"
 - 20: 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God,[a] 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.
 - 20: 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."
- Speaking of God's presence
 - 21: 27 "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes[a] an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Listen, there are two commanding points to be made here.

- 1- If your name is written in the Lamb's book of life – a book that chapter 13 indicates was written before the foundation of the world
 - Your name will not be blotted out.
 - ***Jesus does not own white out***
 - "Oops. Didn't mean to write this one in there from the foundation of the world. I thought Johnny would make it but I was wrong. I made a mistake and put him in here but now I have to blot him out
 - I wish my blood was enough and my work on

Calvary enough to hold him

- But it wasn't. Poor Johnny. Pass the white out."
- This is not how God's grace and finished work of the cross works
- But the second strong point of application here is that while those written are secure
 - The scripture tells us plainly that there are people not written in the book of life.
 - And that's a scary thought.

And maybe you're here this morning and you're wondering if you've been written in that book – the most important book in all heaven.

- This morning you don't have to wonder any longer.
 - To know if you are there or not, can be settled here and now
 - Surrender your life to Jesus and enjoy the security of knowing that when you pass from this life to the next
 - You will be in the presence of Almighty God
 - And not cast into eternal darkness
- Realize that you are a sinner in need of a Savior
 - Confess your sin to Him and Believe on Him
 - Repent from your sins. Stop going your way, and start going His
 - Receive Jesus and ask Him to be your Savior and He will save you

The third, and last promise here in the text – last part of v.5

- "but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels'. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
 - Christ taught the same in the gospels
 - That whoever would confess Him before men, in turn, He would confess before His Father and the angels (Mat. 10:32; Luke 12:8).
- What powerful incentive this is for our own witness of Him in the face of skeptics and mockers!
 - When standing before such men, let's consider ourselves to be standing before the very throne of the Father in our confession of the Son.