

Sardis: Death Through Complacency

Revelation 3:1-6

I would invite you this morning to take your Bibles and turn to Revelation chapter three. This morning we will be looking at the Church of Sardis. And I have entitled my discourse to you this morning, “Sardis: Death Through Complacency.”

Before I preach the text let me introduce my thoughts to you this morning with a story. A number of years a man came to me for counseling. And as he walked through the door I could tell, very quickly, that he was a professional athlete. He was very well built, a specimen of a man. He had a big smile, a very pleasant personality and he was kind. He was mannerly, out going. I found out that he was a professional body builder. But he was dying. He was dying from years of steroid abuse as well as AIDS. He was HIV positive. He was a homosexual. And his presenting problem to me was simply this. He said, in essence, “I am dying. I have been unfaithful to my homosexual lover on hundreds of occasions over the past several years and I need someone to help me break the news to him that I am HIV positive and he probably is, too.”

He claimed to be a Christian. Bible verses would roll off of his tongue. I assured him on the basis of Scripture that he was not, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, that unrepentant homosexuals will never enter the kingdom. The next day I met with him again with his so called “lover” who was the effeminate counterpart of that twosome, another body builder consumed with self worship. And I remember he also claimed to be a Christian, but obviously knew nothing of Christ. He had the same reaction to the truth that the other man did. The second man was hurt when he heard the news, but he admitted that he, too, had been unfaithful—a pitiful situation. The first man died just a little over a year from the first time that I saw him and the second man became very ill with AIDS and I lost track of him.

Their outward appearance was envied by many people in the world. They had a great reputation of strength and vitality and success. They were popular and charming. But, dear friends, all of these things were merely grave clothes. In reality they were spiritual zombies. They were the living dead, living only by the power of their flesh, waiting to die physically, walking spiritually in a direction that would inexorably lead them to the tomb, that of a second death.

What a picture of many churches today. They have all the trappings of spiritual life and yet from God’s perspective they are dead. This, dear friends, was the Church at Sardis. They appeared to be alive and healthy on the outside, but, in fact, they were dead on the inside.

Notice what the text says in Revelation three beginning in verse one.

And 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, but you are dead. Wake up, 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. Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not

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wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon 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. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”¹

Let me give you some historical background of Sardis. This will help us understand the text.

Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira that we studied a few weeks ago, about 50 miles east of Smyrna. And actually this was a city that was divided into two parts. One part was a fortress on top of a magnificent mountain and the other was the sprawling community where most of the people lived that existed about 1500 feet below in a very fertile valley. In fact, in the first century AD, when this letter was written, most all of the agricultural products were raised and sold down in the valley, not up on the mountain. And this was where most of their industries existed, especially woolen industries, linen and textile mills, and they had quite a jewelry industry as well.

Sardis was established in about 1200 BC as the capital of the Lydian Kingdom. Originally it was named Hyde. Later it was governed by Croesus from 560 to 546 BC. Perhaps you will recall hearing the phrase, “As rich as Croesus.” According to legend everything that he touched turned to gold.

And for many centuries Sardis was considered to be an invincible, impregnable fortress that sat on top of a long narrow promontory, this acropolis, this great mountaintop. And all around it there were 1500 foot cliffs that were basically smooth rock walls that went all the way to the bottom. And this stretched all around this great fortress except on the southern side. On that southern boundary there was an elevated strip of land that allowed access to the top of the mountain and the fortress. However, as we read our history we understand that on two occasions, because of their arrogant overconfidence and their failure to be watchful, their enemies managed to scale those tremendous cliffs and enter into the city and conquer them. Croesus and the Lydians were defeated by the Persians who scaled those unguarded walls one by one. And then three and a half centuries later in 214 BC Antiochus the Great of Syria sent his armies against Sardis and they defeated them in the same way.

By the time the Romans controlled Sardis the great fortress atop the acropolis was uninhabited. It was basically a relic of days gone by. The people lived about five miles away in the fertile valley below which would give them easy access to the trade routes created by the impressive road system of the Romans. Much of the city’s prosperity could be attributed to the fact that they were a hub of all of the trade routes that extended in virtually every direction, connecting all of the cities of Asia Minor.

¹ Revelation 3:1-6.

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With regard to religion the people of Sardis were devoted primarily to the worship of the mother goddess Cybele, elsewhere known as Artemis or Diana. You will recall they worshipped this goddess especially in Ephesus. This worship was exceedingly vile. The very worst kinds of idolatry took place in the festivals in her honor. It included the darkest kinds of sexual orgies and many other demonic abominations. But with all forms of paganism, Satanic deceptions permeated many other kinds of false worship that existed there in that day.

Historical evidence indicates that these people were absolutely obsessed with the issues of death and immortality. They worshiped the forces of nature which were considered to be the source of life and death and would provide the power of self reproduction. In the worship of the goddess Cybele we find from archaeological evidence that there were serpents that were pictured as emerging from the earth to shed their skin which they considered to be a sign of their power of rejuvenation. Cybele and Attis, who was supposedly her eunuch chariot driver, were considered to be the guardians of the grave, guardians of the tomb. And life after death was seen as a reunion with the “earth mother” they called her.

According to Robert Thomas, a prominent historian and theologian we understand, quote, “Pagan religions throughout the area attributed healing power to their deities, but in Sardis special emphasis focused on the power to restore life to the dead. This special power was connected with a hot springs about two miles from the city. These springs were viewed as visible manifestations of the power of the god of the underworld which was prominent in the local religious legends,” end quote.

So this was the type of religious chaos that was occurring there in Sardis. We have no information about the founding of the church in Sardis. It was probably founded about 40 years earlier. You will recall when Priscilla and Aquila and the apostle Paul came to Ephesus, no doubt the word spread to Sardis and a church was formed, but we really don't know. But, certainly, by the time this letter is received the church is virtually dead. They would have received this letter somewhere around 96, 97 AD. Like their once mighty fortress on top of the mountain, it was now merely a relic of past history. The church was nothing more than an artifact of arrogance and apathy.

In this letter, dear friends, we have further evidence of the progressive degeneration first spawned by the lack of love in the Church at Ephesus. And whenever one's love for Christ wanes and gradually disappears, compromise with the world will quickly emerge as we saw in the Church at Pergamum. And then the downward spiral will continue with the creation of a new love that will tolerate even more virulent strains of evil, both doctrinal and immoral as we saw in the Church at Thyatira. And then, with an ever increasing rate of speed, the rate of descent quickly plummets downward to spiritual death that we see here in the Church at Sardis. Then that will be followed by a satanically empowered resurrection that gives life to a church that is utterly apostate as we will see in the Church at Laodicea.

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Now, understand the context here. The messenger has arrived at this church in Sardis. He has received it from the apostle John on the isle of Patmos with the others. Undoubtedly he has already read it, all of the Revelation, and he is probably trembling as he prepares to read it to his congregation. Notice what the Lord says in verse one, “And to the angel,”² which would be the messenger or translated pastor, “of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this.”³

Now, the Holy Spirit is in view here. The Lord used a similar self-identification in chapter one and verse four describing the Holy Spirit’s activity, using imagery that was derived from Zechariah four verses one through ten, and the seven fold ministries of the Holy Spirit that was found in Isaiah eleven verse two, that Spirit that will one day rest upon the descendant of David, the Christ who will rule the world as we have studied earlier. And we also see a similar description found in Revelation 5:6. But what does this mean, “He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this”⁴? It means simply this: the Lord of the Church now commissions the Holy Spirit to comprehensively represent Him and call this church to action.

Now we come to the heart of His message to them, and I have divided it into four parts. We will see the *problem, the praise, the punishment and the promise*. And I think it is important to note that this is the first letter that begins with *condemnation* rather than *commendation*.

First notice the problem in verse one. He says, “I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”⁵ And He elaborates on this more at the end of verse two. He says, “For I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”⁶

Now, you can almost hear the congregation gasp with disbelief when this is read. Yet with omniscient clarity God sees what no man can see. God sees what they obviously have not seen. And He says, “Your deeds, in other words your works, your worship, your ministry, all of the activities in your church are deficient. They are unacceptable to Me. They are meaningless in My sight. Oh, yes. I know you have a name, in other words, a reputation. You have a reputation among men and other churches who consider you to be a viable Christian witness. Others think, and you think, that you are alive, but I can see your inward condition and you are dead.” The Greek word nekros (nek-ros’) referring to spiritual death.

To put it in our modern vernacular we might say, “You are all sizzle and no steak. You have the external veneer of spirituality, but beneath the robes of your hypocrisy is a stinking corpse.”

² Revelation 3:1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

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I find it interesting that there is no mention of any persecution from the *outside* here in this letter, even though there was a significant Jewish presence there in Sardis. We see no evidence that they were under attack from the Jews or from the Gentiles. In fact, they had compromised with the world and made peace with those who hate Christ. They, like many today, had become chameleons so that they blended in with the world.

Dead churches and denominations with impressive reputations have always existed. Many times they are characterized by being more concerned with tradition than truth. Man, not the Word of God is the spiritual authority. They will be concerned with material things, typically, far more than spiritual things, obsessed with social ills more than man's soul. You will typically find that they are more concerned with liturgy than with clarity, clarity of the truth. Presenting the transforming and saving truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is simply not a priority in a dead church.

They are more concerned with preserving their creeds and their theological systems than preaching the Word. And, in many cases, you will find that they are far more concerned about massive cathedrals and vestments and ridiculous looking hats, all of the plumage of hypocrisy and candles and incense and icons and all of these symbols, than really proclaiming the truth and living it. All of these things, of course, provide an air of spirituality, but are nothing more than props to hold up the cadaver of their system.

In October I had the privilege of going to Russia. And I remember when I was in Moscow we went to the magnificent Russian orthodox cathedral that is in the heart of Moscow. It was filled with worshippers running around lighting incense and candles and kissing icons and doing all kinds of things. And it occurred to me how that this is nothing more than an ornately decorated mausoleum filled with dead worshippers.

We also see dead churches filling massive auditoriums today even in our country, catering to the felt needs of men who are "dead in their trespasses and sins," according to Ephesians 2:1, men who are not responsive to God, but are driven by corrupt cravings and thoughts and desires, people who accumulate for themselves teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. Dead churches are more concerned with how people will *react* than boldly preaching the truth with clarity and love.

And as we think about what the Word of God says regarding spiritual death, we find that man is powerless over spiritual death. He is as powerless over spiritual death as he is helpless to prevent physical death. Spiritual death, according to Scripture, results in a state of rebellion against God. In fact, in Ephesians chapter four and verse 18 we read how the spiritually dead have their understanding darkened. They cannot see the light of truth. It says that they are alienated from the life of God, that they are ignorant and that they are blind to the truth.

In Romans one we read how that death is marked by a stubborn refusal to acknowledge God as sovereign Creator and holy Judge. We are told in Romans 8:6 that man is ruled

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by his lusts, “The mind set on the flesh is death.”⁷ In fact, the spiritually dead, according to 1 Timothy 5:6 live only for “wanton pleasure.”

And, worse yet, think about this, because of man’s seething resentment of God’s holy standard, he rejects his only possible source of salvation. His enmity with God, therefore, sentences him to divine wrath. Because of spiritual death, the Word of God says that man is, by nature, “an object of wrath,” Ephesians 2:3. Therefore, “it is appointed for men to once die and after this comes judgment,” Hebrews 9:27, a judgment that leads to a second death in the lake of fire according to Revelation 20 and verse 14.

So man’s only hope is found in the gospel of grace. And, dear friends, only the sharp edge of the gospel with all of its offense can possibly pierce the heart of the spiritual dead. It was for this reason that the apostle Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.”⁸ But dead churches will do all they can to blunt that edge, to somehow remove the offense of the cross and become like the world.

I remember when I lived in California a *seeker sensitive* church approached me and asked me to come to speak to their church. The pastor was quick to let me know kind of the rules of their church. And I remember he said, “Whatever you do, don’t mention the words sin, repentance, hell, wrath, judgment...” And he had a number of others like that. And he said, “We want them to see the love of God and to make the gospel appealing.”

And I was quick to remind him, “Dear sir, don’t you realize, according to John three, that the Lord Jesus said that unless they believe in Him they are going to perish. Don’t you think people need to understand that in verse 18 the Lord says, ‘He who does not believe has been judged already’?”⁹ Don’t you think they need to know that the wrath of God abides on them?” Well, that conversation quickly deteriorated and he rescinded his request, his invitation for me to come.

Dear friends, may I say something here that is so, so very important? *Any gospel message that is appealing to sinners is a counterfeit gospel.* Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”¹⁰

Now, sadly, through carelessness and complacency, the enemy of compromise had scaled the cliffs of this church in Sardis and captured them. I find this to be such a haunting scene as I think about it. A church filled with zombies, if I can use a science fiction metaphor, people that are lifeless, that are powerless, hypocrites. It is like looking into some kind of a religious wax museum.

⁷ Romans 8:6.

⁸ Romans 1:16.

⁹ John 3:18.

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 1:18.

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And what an ironic twist. Think of this—a dead church that existed in a region known for its life giving hot springs.

Well, that was the *problem*. Notice the *praise*. Here we drop down to verse four. “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.”¹¹ Here we see that God had preserved a remnant of faithful believers in that place. It says in “Sardis,” whether that was actually in the church or maybe they were kind of hanging around the periphery, we don’t really know. But we would assume that it was in this church. I am sure, however, that they were spiritually malnourished, starving for truth and fellowship, believers withering on the vine as all saints do if they are in these kinds of churches. But you must remember, they couldn’t just pack their bags and move down the street to some other church. This was the only show in town.

They “have not soiled their garments.” “Garments” symbolize character in Scripture and these had not soiled their garments. “Soiled,” in the original language, means to smear or to defile or pollute. An inscription found in that region indicated that soiled garments disqualified a worshipper and dishonored the god they worshipped. So they would have understood this idea of a soiled garment. And yet this tiny remnant had not allowed the prevailing wickedness of the world to contaminate the purity of their faith and devotion to Christ.

Now this may also be—and I don’t want to be dogmatic with this—but perhaps this is also a reference to a common practice among the heathen there in Sardis that worshipped Cybele and Attis. They had a ceremony whereby worshipers clothed in white garments would place themselves under a bull slain over them and bathe in its blood thinking that the life force of the bull would rejuvenate them. Obviously that would stain their garments significantly.

But the Lord is fully aware here that there are, according to verse four, a few people “that have not soiled their garments. . . and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”¹² This undefiled remnant will be clothed in “white garments” according to verse five. They will “stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy” as Jude tells us, adorned with the white robes of purity and holiness that will be worn by Christ Himself and the holy angels as Scripture indicates.

Frequently, people who discover they are in a dead church will ask me, “What should I do?” And I will quite often ask them, “Well, what would you do if you were living in a house filled with corpses?” Well, obviously, because of the stench and the corruption and the possibility of disease, you would get out. The same thing should be true if you are in a dead church.

¹¹ Revelation 3:4.

¹² Ibid.

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The psalmist said in Psalm 69:9, “Zeal for Thy house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me.”¹³ In other words, those who truly love God cannot stand to see Him dishonored. It is extremely offensive. In fact, in John two when Jesus cleansed the temple with the scourge of cords you will recall in verse 17, “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR THY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’”¹⁴ Again, how can anyone who loves the Lord tolerate being in a church that dishonors him. Well, this will be the admonition that the Lord gives this faithful remnant here in Sardis.

Thirdly, we notice the *prescription*. And here we have a five step remedy given primarily, I believe, to the remnant that is here, more so than the unbelievers that made up the vast majority of this church.

Verse two gives us this list. First of all he says, “Wake up.”¹⁵ It could be translated, “Prove yourself to be watchful. Honestly evaluate your spiritual condition. Be constantly on the alert lest your lack of vigilance allow even more wickedness to scale your walls and take you captive.” *Wake up*, number one.

Secondly, “Strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die.”¹⁶ Strengthen has the idea of reinforce or fortify that which survives. That is to say, “Rediscover the truths of the gospel and the principles of faithful obedience. Understand afresh what it means to serve the Lord Jesus Christ as His slave, Him being your Lord and your master.” “Strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die.”¹⁷

Thirdly—and here we have three principles that help us understand how to strengthen these things—thirdly, “Remember therefore what you have received and heard.”¹⁸ And you must understand, this is not referring to the idea of trying to recall something that you have forgotten. But the notion here is to always maintain in the forefront of your mind the doctrinal truths that were taught to you by the apostles. Remember those things, keep them in the forefront of your mind.

Fourthly, he says, “And keep it,”¹⁹ a command here to “keep on keeping.” It is a present imperative. “Keep on keeping it.” In other words, live consistently with what you know to be true.

And, fifthly, he says, “And repent,”²⁰ from the Greek verb *metanoeo* (met-an-o-eh'-o). It means “I repent,” a verb that carries with it not only the idea of having remorse over your sin, but a decisive determination to turn your life around and walk in a different direction.

¹³ Psalm 69:9.

¹⁴ John 2:17.

¹⁵ Revelation 3:2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Revelation 3:3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

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Repent, a change of heart, a change of will. We would all do well to apply those five steps to our lives, would we not?

And then He continues and at the end of verse He says, “If therefore you will not wake up...”²¹ In other words, if you refuse to accept my terms and you desire to stay dead in your spiritual lethargy, “I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”²² The Lord never sugar coats his warnings, does He? He is saying, in effect, “You must turn away from your defection immediately or else I will come upon you unexpectedly. I will come upon you suddenly. I will come upon you swiftly in judgment.” Now the language here is similar to that used to describe the second coming of Christ. However, that is not necessarily what is in view here. But certainly the symbolism of divine judgment is the same.

Now, it is interesting. The text does not tell us the specific nature of divine judgment that the Lord had in mind for this church. And while Scripture is very clear about the nature of *eternal* judgment, *temporal* judgment can take on many, many different forms, especially with dead, apostate churches. And I believe that it probably took on the form of the wrath of divine abandonment as we see in Romans one where God gives men over to the consequences of their iniquities. This is probably what happened in this church.

May I remind you of this in Romans one verse 18. We read that “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”²³ And verse 21 goes on to say they do “not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”²⁴ In other words, the darkness of deception replaces the light of truth. Verse 22 says, “they profess to become wise, they become fools. They exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.”²⁵ In other words, man, instead of worshipping God prefers to deify himself and worship himself or other men.

He goes on and says that they worship “birds and four footed animals and crawling creatures.” In other words, they will worship all manner of man made things that dishonor God rather than serving and worshipping the true and the living God, their only hope of salvation. Man’s refusal to honor God always precedes idolatry.

So in verse 24 of Romans one, “Therefore,” because of all of this, “God gave them over,”²⁶ *paradidomi* (par-ad-id’-o-mee). It is a very intense Greek verb and it is often used in a judicial sense to denote a man being handed over to judgment or a person being handed over to an executioner. It is even used to describe demons being delivered to pits of darkness in 2 Peter 2:4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Romans 1:18.

²⁴ Romans 1:21.

²⁵ See Romans 1:22-23.

²⁶ Romans 1:24.

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Then the text goes on to describe this progression of the wrath of divine abandonment whereby God gives people over to the consequences of their iniquity by lifting his restraining grace, first, in verse 24 He gives them over to “the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.”²⁷ So, first, He gives them over to the lusts of their hearts. Secondly, He gives them over “to degrading passions” (verse 26). And if you read that text you will see a description of those who defy God’s moral order with the vile and shameless acts of homosexuality, a base inversion of God’s created order. And then, finally, He gives them over in verse 28 to a “depraved,” or in other words, a worthless “mind to do those things which are not proper.”²⁸ Then there follows a long list of every imaginable form of wickedness, all of which are distinguishing marks of a dead church. This is the wrath of divine abandonment.

Now, certainly, this kind of progressive degeneration was already in an advanced stage in the Church in Sardis. And perhaps this was the fate they experienced. Again, this certainly describes many dead churches and denominations, churches that are marked by scandals of immorality. Some are even led by homosexuals and on and on it goes.

Then notice, fourthly, the *promise*. The Lord closes here with a fascinating promise. Verse five, “He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments.”²⁹ Again, a reference to the purity of sinless perfection that will one day be given to all believers.

Then He says something interesting. “And I will not erase his name from the book of life.”³⁰ What a wonderful promise. And, frankly, one that should silence forever any one that would suggest that a true believer could lose his salvation, a position that is clearly refuted in the promise that the Lord gives in this passage. “I will not erase his name from the book of life.”³¹

Now some will foolishly argue on the basis of Exodus 32:33 that you *can* have your name erased, and the context there was where the Lord told Moses that, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.”³² And they say, “See, right there. It can happen.” But you must understand, that “book” in Exodus is referring to the book of the living, the record of those who are alive, a census registry, “the book of life” as we read in Psalm 69:28. This is where untimely or premature deaths would constitute being blotted out of the record of that book. In fact, the context in Exodus was that of Moses having such love for his kinsmen that he was willing to offer up his own life rather than for God to judge his people for their idolatry of the golden calf.

And in verse 32 of that text he says, “Forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!”³³

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Romans 1:28.

²⁹ Revelation 3:5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Exodus 32:33

³³ Exodus 32:32.

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But, as you will recall, the Lord would not permit that and instead He said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.”³⁴ And, as the story goes on the Lord killed the idolaters.

Dear friends, the issue there was *physical death, not eternal damnation*. The book described in Exodus 32 is not the book of life described in Revelation 3:5 also mentioned in Philippians 4:3 and later in Revelation 13:8, 17:8, 20 and verse 12, verse 15 as well as chapter 21 and verse 27, all of which refer to a registry of the elect where God recorded the names of those people in that registry, in that book, all of those who would inherit eternal life, a book, from which, according to our text here in Revelation 3:5, our names will never be erased.

Perhaps some context will offer further help here. Census registries were also kept there in the first century. They had a registry of every citizen primarily for tax purposes. We are familiar with that here in our country. And whenever a person died or if they committed some kind of a heinous crime, their name would be erased from that book. So they understood the context here.

So here is what the Lord is promising. He is saying, “I will never erase the name of one of my own, those whom I have purchased with my very blood, citizens of the kingdom of heaven whose names were,” according to Revelation 13:8, “Written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”³⁵

So, beloved, please understand, here the Lord is trying to *encourage* this remnant of overcomers, not *threaten* them. This is the same glorious promise Paul described in Romans eight verses 28 through 39. Remember that magnificent passage where he emphatically promised that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.³⁶

So in verse five he says, “He who overcomes shall thus be clothed 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.”³⁷

Here the Lord repeats what he said often in his earthly ministry. Remember in Matthew 10:32:

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.³⁸

And, likewise, in Luke chapter 12 verse eight the Lord says:

³⁴ Exodus 32:33.

³⁵ Revelation 13:8.

³⁶ See Romans 8:39.

³⁷ Revelation 3:5.

³⁸ Matthew 10:33-34.

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I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.³⁹

Oh, child of God, grab a hold of this now. What an inconceivably wonderful promise to know that in the highest courts of heaven, in the ineffable grandeur of glory, in the company of the heavenly host of all of the angels, and in the presence of almighty God, Christ will confess us . . . will confess all who confess Him. To think that the lover of our souls, our master and our king will introduce us by name and say, “This one is mine.”

Oh, the promise of heaven sublime,
At last in white robes we’ll be dressed,
When faith will be sight in His glory divine,
And by grace our names then confessed.

Finally he says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”⁴⁰

We really don’t know if they did. We do not know how long that church existed in that form. Archaeologists have found papyri fragments containing the writings of Melito, bishop of Sardis. I have read some of them. They are not terribly orthodox, but he was certainly a voluminous writer during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in AD 161 through 169. Perhaps there was some measure of revival. We simply don’t know.

But, dear friends, we do know the fate of those who refuse to hear. They will decay along with the world they emulate. May this never be said of us, by God’s grace.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we plead with You that by Your power we would live consistently with the truths that you have delineated here in this text. We pray that each of us will examine our lives in light of what You have told us today. Lord, we want to live for You. We don’t want to be like so many who look like they are alive on the outside, who have some name and some reputation that are, in fact, dead on the inside. Lord, thank You for Your saving grace, for the power of Your Word, for the indwelling Spirit that gives us life. Again, Lord, may we by Your power, walk consistently with the newness of life that You have given us? We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

³⁹ Luke 12:8-9.

⁴⁰ Revelation 3:6.

Sardis: Death Through Complacency

Revelation 3:1-6

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

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