

Rev.3:1-6 “Sardis: the Lively Dead Church”
tape 162 11-24-2002

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

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

The Bible is not a book. It is a library of books written by over 40 authors (from peasants to kings) over a span of 1 ½ millennia on 3 continents in 3 languages and discusses the most controversial subjects there are with no contradictions and with absolute unity.

There is no other work anything like it, because it is the only book that was divinely inspired.

And after God had inspired and preserved 65 books, He decided to close out the entire work with one more important book.

This book is a record of a vision that communicates a message directly from the Lord Jesus Christ to His Church.

So if we, as a church, take anything seriously, it should be the message of the Book of Revelation.

It starts with a vision of the glorified Christ in ch.1, and then seven letters to 7 churches that represent all the various churches throughout the ages.

So instead of doing surveys of our community to find out what the people around here are looking for in a church, we are studying these letters to help us understand what Jesus looks for in a church.

1

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

In the past Sardis had been a very important military power, a strategic political power, and the capital of Asia.

But by the time of this letter it's glory days were a thing of the past. The only part of that they still had was their wealth (they had a thriving wool industry).

They lobbied hard to get the honor of having the Temple to Ceasar, but that honor went to Smyrna.

They tried to build a temple to Artemis that would rival the famous one in Ephesus, but it was never completed.

"No city of Asia at that time showed such a melancholy contrast between past splendor and present decay as Sardis" (William M. Ramsay quoted in Gaebelin)

The luxurious living of the Sardians led to moral decadence (Gaebelin)

Sardis was also known for their impressive cemetery, of "a thousand hills", so named because of the hundreds of burial mounds visible on the skyline some seven miles from Sardis.

I am the Source of fruitbearing for a church

Look how Jesus introduces Himself to this church:

Thus saith the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

the seven spirits of God

Right off the bat Jesus starts out with a difficult phrase.

We see it first in Rev.1:4

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness

There it sounds like it's referring to the Holy Spirit. The number 7 represented completeness, so calling the Holy Spirit "the seven spirits of God" may be a way of emphasizing the fullness of all that the Holy Spirit is (but not implying that there are actually 7 separate persons).

This phrase occurs only in Revelation (4 times – all in the first 5 chapters).

The other three times we see it, it appears in connection with the throne of God.

I'm no math major, but the first time I read that it really seemed to throw off my trinitarian calculations.

All the way through the Bible there has been only one Holy Spirit, now this. What is this?

The concept shows up again in ch.4 and then again in ch.5. In ch.5 the seven spirits are pictured as 7 eyes that search out the whole earth.

Rev.5:6

Then I saw a Lamb... He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Just like everything else in the Book of Revelation in order to understand it you have to appreciate the OT background.

4

Most of the imagery of this letter comes out of the Zech.3,4.

TT (2nd to last OT book Zeph, Hag. Zech, Mal)

In Zechariah's time the Jews were returning to the Promised Land after their captivity, and Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua were facing the seemingly impossible project rebuilding the Temple.

It really didn't seem like they had the authority, nor the ability nor the resources to even begin to do such a project.

And so God gives Zechariah a vision in ch.4.

Zech.4:1-6

Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. 2 He asked me, "What do you see?"

I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.

Don't picture a candelabra here, because their lamps were not candles, but oil lamps.

This lampstand had a big bowl of oil at the top, and oil flowed from that down to the 7 lamps. And from the wording in the Hebrew it sounds like each of the 7 lamps had 7 lights (wicks). So there would be 49 lights with plenty of oil flowing to each one.

7 = completeness, so 7 X 7 = completeness squared – *plentiful* oil.

6

In v.4 Zechariah wants to know what the vision means.

4 I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"

5 He answered, "Do you not know what these are?"

"No, my lord," I replied.

6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

"It's not human power that accomplishes My work. It's My Spirit who accomplishes my work."

This is a message to Joshua and Zerubbabel: "The only resource you need for this task is My empowering Spirit – which is flowing plentifully through My people."

7 "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground.

This mountain-like task before you of building the Temple – that mountain will become flat ground. It will be a piece of cake.

Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'"

You will put that capstone on and everyone will be calling for God's blessing on the new Temple.

10 "Who despises the day of small things? They will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel, These seven eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.

Who is it who's going to try to say what you are doing isn't important? Who would dare say, "It's a small thing. It's insignificant. It will never amount to much of anything. You're not accomplishing anything...?"

The beginning of a project like that is always slow, and it seems that very little is getting done.

But if you question how important it is, the eyes of Yahweh – which are aware of everything going on everywhere in the world, will rejoice when they see this happening.

In other words, it ranks right up there with the most important things in the universe.

So in Rev.3 when Jesus introduces Himself to the church in Sardis by saying, "**Thus saith the one who holds the seven spirits of God**" He is highlighting the fact that it is He who sends or withdraws the Holy Spirit, who is the only source of spiritual power for a church.

TT Rev.4

John uses this phrase "7 spirits of God" another time.

Rev.4:5

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

So there is no question that Zech.4 is in mind. Here the seven spirits are the seven lamps.

8

In Revelation we already know what the seven lampstands are – the churches.

So if the churches are the lampstands, and the lamp that's being held by the lampstands is the work of God empowered by the Holy Spirit (symbolized by the oil), then we can understand the church to be the bearer of the divine work of the Holy Spirit on earth.

Did you get that? We are not the lamp. We are the lampstand. The lamp is the work of God – pictured as a flame of fire.

But the flame of fire isn't there unless there is a supply of oil coming to the lampstand.

The Holy Spirit is portrayed as the fuel that lights the oil lamp in each individual fellowship – a lamp that is the work of God in this world through the church.

So it's not that there are 7 Holy Spirits. There is only one Holy Spirit. The imagery of the seven parts symbolizes the fullness, abundance and completeness of the Holy Spirit in His work in all the various churches everywhere in the world.

And the Person who controls all that is Jesus Christ.

So He starts out this letter: "Dear Sardis: **Thus saith the one who holds the seven spirits of God**

"I control the Holy Spirit. I control the flow of fuel to the lamps. If I send the Spirit, the church will enjoy a flood of divine spiritual power and ability to accomplish God's work."

10

If I withdraw the Spirit from a church, that church will be left with nothing at all spiritually. It might keep going with all its programming, but it will be like an oil lamp with no oil.

and the seven stars

That's from the vision in ch.1, and there we found that His holding the 7 stars reminds us that He controls the ultimate fate of the churches.

So the first thing the Lord wants to communicate to this church is that He is sovereign over whether a church's lamp is burning or not.

Isaiah 11

There also seems to be a reference to the passage in Isa.11 about the Spirit of the Lord who will rest upon the Messiah. In the LXX it says

"The Spirit of God will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom (that's one) and understanding (2), a spirit of counsel (3) and might (4), a spirit of knowledge (5) and godliness (6); the Spirit will fill him with the fear of the Lord (7)"

So Isa.11 talks about the 7-fold Spirit.

(only six benefits are found in the MT; six are mentioned in 4Q 161 = 4QIsaiah Peshera^a 8–10 iii 11–13; and six are mentioned in rabbinic literature: cf. *b. Sanh.* 93ab; *Num. Rab.* 13.11; *Gen. Rab.* 2.4.97; *Ruth Rab.* 7.2).

That passage is significant because it goes on to say

3 He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;

4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

There is no need for Him to use His eyes and ears to gather evidence to make a judgment. He has the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, etc. – He has that Spirit that functions as the very eyes of God.

In other words, He doesn't have to gather evidence with His senses – He already knows everything.

If you are standing before a judge who makes a decision by weighing the evidence he can see and hear, you might be able to get off even if you are guilty.

But this judge doesn't use that method. If you are before a judge who uses the method of omniscience to judge you, there is no fooling Him with dead externalism.

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

“You have a reputation of life, but really all you are are the contents of one of those burial mounds.”

That's it. They have a phony reputation of being alive. That's the sum total of their works.

Now He's done talking about their works, and Jesus moves on with the exhortation.

Their only work was being dead.

What Makes a Church Alive or Dead?

I don't know what comes to your mind when you hear about a dead church.

- Maybe you picture a place with outdated décor, where the music is kind of dry and boring and not very lively.

But that's no measure of spiritual life. I told you before about an underground church in China that has to "sing" silently, and it is very much a living church.

- Maybe you picture a dwindling little group of elderly people unable to attract new members and about to close their doors.

But that can't be it. That would be a church that *looked* dead. This church looked alive.

15

They were thought of as a vibrant church. The other churches were probably jealous.

Maybe some of the struggling little churches around Asia Minor sent their elder board to come visit the Sardis church to find out how they do it.

This church must have been a lively place. No doubt it was the envy of many other churches.

I bet there were people in Smyrna putting pressure on the leadership "we need to be more like Sardis."

(Remember Smyrna – the poverty-stricken, unpopular, persecuted little group who struggled to survive, afflicted and troubled... They were the only church so far that received no rebuke at all from Jesus.)

So this church in Sardis was a popular church, a vibrant church, a lively church, and attractive church, a wealthy church...

16

So if all that was true, why are they regarded as dead?

It's because liveliness is not the same as spiritual life.

They were like the fig tree in Mt.21:19 that had leaves but no fruit. From a distance a tree like that looks healthy, but for all intents and purposes it's dead.

A church can have thousands of people involved in hundreds of programs, and be as dead as doornail.

In fact, it was probably the very fact that they were dead that led to their popularity and reputation for liveliness.

Notice this church doesn't seem to have any problems.

Caird: "There are no Jewish accusers, no apostolic impostors, no fraternizing Nicolaitans, no prophetic ecstasy. This is a church which everyone speaks well of, the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity, unable to distinguish between the peace of well-being and the peace of death." (48)

A lot of individual people are like that. Their lives are flowing along with a wonderful smoothness, and they don't realize that that's not the peace of well-being, it's the peace that comes from being spiritually dead.

The same thing happens to churches.

I'm sure nothing controversial was ever said by the pastor.

And most likely there was no error in the preaching.

Churches like this very often have a pastor who just gets up and states the obvious every week. No one can complain, because what he is saying is true, but it's so shallow he secretly starves everyone to death.

TT Eph.4

18

If you want to know what makes a church dead, all you have to do is study what makes a church alive, and that's spelled out in Eph.4.

...and the key is in v.16, where we see that the body grows when **each part does its work.**

The church is alive and healthy not when we have a certain music style or everyone is smiling, etc.

Our church is alive and healthy and growing spiritually when each part does its work.

So the big question everyone asks is “What is my work? How do I know what I’m supposed to be doing? What is my calling here at this time?”

It starts in v.11 when Christ gives the church leaders who preach and teach the Word of God to the people, in order to prepare them to carry out their work (your work – your calling is the task God wants you to carry out right now).

Finding your calling is not as hard as some people make it. Your calling is just whatever task God wants you to be doing right now.

Sometimes He wants you doing something within the parameters of your giftedness, other times He calls you to do things you aren’t gifted at at all.

In the past we did an extensive study of how to discover your calling, but if I could try to summarize everything I learned from that in one statement, I would say this: You find what your calling is right now by matching your gifts, abilities and desires with the opportunities that are available right now as closely as possible.

There was a time in my ministry when I was searching for my calling when I was attending a church in Canon City.

I knew my gifts were in the area of teaching. My abilities included the fact that I had 2 arms and 2 legs, and the only opportunity available to me for ministry in that church was stacking chairs after the service. So that was my God-given role in that church at that time.

And when everyone carries out their roles, that’s when a church is alive and bears spiritual fruit.

Eph.4:11-16

It was he who gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ...

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

21

The more people learn from the Bible teachers in order to equip themselves for ministry, and then carry out their calling in the church for right now, the more spiritual life we have, and the body grows spiritually.

“Why? Why is *that* called spiritual life, and another church, where all the people are just as busy, is spiritually dead?”

Because spiritual life doesn't come from busyness.

Life comes from God. Spiritual fruit comes only from the power of the Holy Spirit through your work.

22

And when you do not follow God's direction and do what He wants you doing, or if you are not learning from God's Word and growing spiritually yourself, then there is no promise that His power will flow out from your ministry.

Another tip on finding your calling is this: instead of asking, “What do I like to do?” or “What am I good at doing?” you should ask, “What am I passionate about seeing done?”

I don't know if there is anyone who puts more energy into a ministry than my mom puts into the children's ministry. There's no question that's her calling.

She puts massive effort toward that ministry.

23

But I don't think she does it because she thinks, “I just love standing in front of a classroom full of 5-year olds and teaching.”

I don't think she ever thought, “I love preparing materials for the other teachers.” Or “I really enjoy constantly trying to recruit more teachers.”

I don't think she took a spiritual gift inventory that told her “You were designed by God to find subs for teachers who will be out of town.”

No. She has the energy she has for that ministry not because she enjoys every detail of the mechanics of carrying it out. She has that energy

because she just has a driving passion to see the kids at Creekside be nurtured spiritually.

24

More than anything else she wants *that* to happen, and she will do anything to see that it gets done.

When you have a church full of people who are being trained by the teaching of God's Word and become passionate about seeing some area of ministry be successful, and they pour themselves into that, that's when you will have a fruit-bearing church.

That's when we will really be alive!

But if we try to achieve spiritual life through human means...

And we revert to preaching and teaching that is mostly motivational, it may be more fun to listen to than theology, the sermons are easier to listen to, you walk out feeling better about yourself...

But that produces a lot of people who may do a lot of things – all kinds of appearance of life, but without divine power.

Lots of leaves, but no spiritual fruit.

You can't measure a church by its activity. It's measured by the spiritual fruit.

- Are people with temper problems becoming less angry?
- Are shaky marriages being restored?
- Are people with habitual sins making progress?
- Are people's perspectives shifting from being worldly to being more biblical?
- Is there a general rise in the level of love, joy, peace...?

If not, the church is probably dead on its feet.

Churches like the one in Sardis are like Samson when he was awakened by Delilah after he allowed her to cut his hair (in violation of his vow to God).

Judg.16:20 **he did not know that the LORD had left him.**

26

He woke up thinking he was as strong as ever. The power of God had left him, and he didn't know it. He couldn't feel it.

And so He didn't find out until he found himself being overpowered by his enemies – when it was too late.

That can happen to a church. For a while it can be like the mighty Samson – the power of the Holy Spirit working mightily through the church.

But as they are more and more tempted to accommodate the world, please the world, impress the world, be accepted by the world, they begin to

- file some of the sharp edges off the Gospel
- water down the preaching and avoid controversial topics
- back off of confronting people's sin
- trade in biblical methods for man's newer and more exciting methods

27

And bit by bit we choke off the flow of oil. We remove ourselves from the source of spiritual power. And the church begins to die...

...but no one even knows it, because the activities and the music and the programs are as lively as ever.

There is a reason why Jesus introduced Himself to this Church as the one who has the seven Spirits of God. The picture is of Him being the one who controls the flow of the oil to the lamps.

He gives or withdraws His Spirit. And the implication is if they don't listen to Him and repent, the last little trickle of oil will be cut off completely.

28

The Exhortations

Jesus gives this church 5 imperatives in vv.2-3.

#1 **2 Wake up!**

Lit. "Become alert"

The solution to spiritual deadness is to wake up.

Being dead involves being "asleep at the wheel" – not being consciously aware of spiritual realities.

This would have caught their attention in Sardis because of their history.

Because of their physical location, this city was virtually impregnable.

The city sat atop 1500 ft. sheer cliffs. The only way into the city was a steep, narrow passage that was easily defended.

Countless armies tried and failed to capture the city over the centuries.

But twice in their history they were defeated. Both times because they weren't vigilant.

29

Once some soldiers just climbed the cliffs one by one. A child could have easily defended the city against such an attack, but they were so secure and complacent that they didn't even so much as have a person stand guard to watch that wall.

That's how it is when you're a big success, and you have a great reputation for being strong.

Some churches are like stars that have burned out years ago, but we are still seeing the light from that star that was still traveling toward us when the star died. So we look up and see light in that spot in the sky, even though in reality there is no longer a star there.

That happens to churches.

There may be a time when our children listen to this tape and think, “Yeah, Creekside is just sort of coasting on the strength of its past, but right now we are dead.”

But even for now this is an important thought for us as individuals. Those of you who are strong – who have withstood the onslaught of the enemy. Let him who thinks he is strong beware lest he fall.

#2 Strengthen what remains and is (was) about to die

The **was** is epistolatory – referring back to the writing of the letter (Thomas and Lenski). “Strengthen that little bit that, last I heard, was still alive but on life support.”

Even though Christ uses the imagery of death, still He calls on them to take the initiative to recover.

Spiritually they are in a condition that resembles death, but it’s not exactly like death. They still are able to do something that would bring about recovery.

Even in the deadest church there is generally some vestige of life.

- Some relic leftover from when they were alive – some Bible lying open somewhere that they could begin to stop using as a decoration and start drawing out the spiritual nourishment like a baby at its mother’s breast.

for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

It’s like Dan.5 – you have been weighed in the scales and were found wanting.

What was good enough to impress men was not good enough for God. Be careful about measuring yourself by what others think.

Their work as a church was like that unfinished Temple to Artemis – a monument to failure (incomplete).

No doubt they were doing a lot of work, but they were missing the key ingredient – the power of God.

They had built a magnificent car, but forgot to include an engine.

They had written a terrific book, but forgot to put words on the pages.

33

#3 3 Remember, therefore, what (lit. how) you have received and heard

The word **what** (πῶς) literally means “how” and is being used here in the form of indirect discourse (Thayer and BAG) – “Remember *the fact that* you received and heard.”

It’s an elliptical construction – the sentence seems incomplete. He says, “Remember how you received and heard? Keep!”

That kind of abbreviated way of speaking is designed to get us to the heart of the issue. He doesn’t even say what it is we received and heard.

This is a fascinating figure of speech in which you emphasize something by not even saying it.

It would be like saying to someone in adultery, “Remember how you vowed and you pledged? Well, now you need to fulfill.” You purposefully leave out exactly what it is he vowed and pledged so that when he fills in that blank it will focus his attention on that.

Jesus wants them to think – what exactly was it that you received and heard? He wants to them to think back and remember it. Pull it to the forefront of their thinking.

It also draws attention to the fact that it was *received*.

The Gospel is not just some information you dug up. It is a trust that you received – a gift.

#4 obey it lit. keep

We keep seeing this word again and again. We are to keep His doctrine and His works.

That's more than just obeying. It's steadfastly and with loyalty holding to the Christian life.

#5 and repent. (there's that again)

Those are the steps to recovery for a dead church (or individual).

1. Become alert to spiritual things. Wake up to the spiritual realities.
2. Find whatever lingering vestige of life that may be remaining, and strengthen that. (Maybe you still have a little bit of a prayer life, or maybe you still have a little connection with the fellowship, etc. Instead of using that for an excuse for continued apathy, use that as an avenue to restoration).
3. Remember the fact that the Gospel was graciously granted to you as a gift – don't show contempt for that gift by setting it aside.

35

Remind yourself of the manner in which you received the Gospel at first. Get back to that.

4. Hold to that. Keep it.
5. Repent. Turn your back on the world, and return to God in desperation to be restored.

But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

This has to refer to the Second Coming.

It was Jesus who coined the imagery of coming as a thief, the phrase is used 9 times in the NT by 5 different writers (Matthew, Luke, Paul, Peter and John) and is used one other time in Revelation clearly referring to the Second Coming (16:15).

The problem of it being contingent upon Sardis' unrepentance isn't a problem. The Day of the Lord comes as a thief to everyone who isn't ready
1 Thes.5:4 you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

It's not that their condition will determine *when* He comes, but rather whether or not for them it will be like a thief.

And remember, regardless of what is taking place with the end times, for you the end could come at any moment, because when a person dies, for him that's it. There is no more opportunity for change.

Don't leave your actions incomplete saying, "I'll get better soon." If you don't repent of that kind of thinking right now you may very well run out of time.

37

He doesn't even say what he'll do when He comes. He doesn't say it, because it's obvious.

The Book of Life

4 Yet you (singular – the angel) have a few people (lit. names) in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.

Here Jesus tips even the original readers off that perhaps these people who are going to be overcomers include a broader group than just these people in their churches.

I will never blot out his name from the book of life

During the intertestamental period the Jews spoke extensively of three books in heaven: the Book of Life, the Book of Deeds, and the Book of Destiny. (Aune, WBC) The NT confirms that they were right.

Presumably these are the books that were opened when the heavenly court was convened and seated in Dan.7.

The Book of Destiny was written before you were born. It contains all the details of God's plan for your life.

In Ps 139:16 David is speaking about while he was still in the womb: **your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.** (also Ps 56:8, where David's tears are recorded in God's book.)

The Book of deeds records all your deeds, and is used for Judgment Day. The Book of life is also used on Judgment Day, and in it are recorded all the names of the people who will not suffer the penalty for their sins.

We see both the book of deeds and the book of life mentioned in the account of the final judgment in Rev 20:11-12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The book of life is what determines your final destiny (life or death), and the book of deeds demonstrates God's justice in that decision.

We can trace the origin of the concept of the Book of life way back to Ex.32, where Moses prays for mercy for Israel.

39

Ex 32:32-33

32 But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." 33 The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.

This is a Book is a registry of who is faithful to God and thus worthy of His blessing.

In Ps.69 and Dan.12 we find that it is a list of the names of the righteous, and their name being written in there was a record of their citizenship among the community of those who are to inherit eternal life.

Having your name blotted out of the book represents expulsion from that community.

In ancient culture there are many examples of the practice of removing the name of someone who has been sentenced to death from the citizenship roles prior to executing him (WBC).

40

Ps 69:27-28

Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

Dan 12:1-2

at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

So the only names that get written in that book are those who are God's people who are to be delivered and raised to everlasting life.

And that is confirmed in Rev 21:27, where the New Jerusalem is described:

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

41

Some people have been troubled at the thought that a name could be written in there and then blotted out. In Ps.69 it wasn't the Philistines or something, it was David's own brothers, to whom he went for comfort.

And here in this passage remaining in the book of life is conditional. If you don't overcome, your name will be erased.

If their names remain in either way, what would be the point of this promise?

In an effort to reconcile that with other passages that make strong statements about our eternal security, some have suggested that everyone's name starts out in that book, and when you die as an unbeliever your name is blotted out.

But if it's the book of who is saved, that would mean everyone starts out saved, which is the opposite of what Scripture teaches.

That view would also be hard to reconcile with the actual statements about the book of life. For example, Phil 4:3

help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Obviously he's not referring to everyone in the whole world who is still alive.

Luke 10:20

do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Heb.10:23 ...**to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.**

And the other references in Revelation make it even more clear:

Rev.13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast-all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

Rev 17:8

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast

These promises at the end of each letter have a dual function. They are to serve as both a positive and a negative motivation for overcoming.

Those who overcome will get these promises. Those who do not, won't. Those who have soiled their garments and who are dying spiritually, if they do not repent, will be blotted out.

but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Again, the promise contains an implied warning. Jesus is quoting Himself.

Luke 12:8-10

8 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. 9 But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

43

2 Tim 2:12

if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

White Clothes

4 Yet you (singular – the angel) have a few people (lit. names) in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

He calls them names, because the issue at hand is over whether a person's name will be blotted out of the Book of Life or acknowledged before the Father (v.5).

These people haven't contaminated their clean garments. That implies that the others had.

They will walk with me, (dressed) in white, for they are worthy.
This also comes out of the Zechariah passage.

TT Zech.3.

In this vision, Joshua, the High Priest right after Israel was restored from captivity back to the promised land, is standing before God representing the nation of Israel.

Zech.3:1-

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. 2 The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.

So Israel is pictured here as being sinful and filthy. And Satan is accusing them, and the angel of Yahweh is defending them.

4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

The picture is of God taking away Israel's sin.

Then v.5 always cracks me up. Zechariah, who is just watching this great vision of heaven, pipes up and throws in his two cents:

5 Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head."

You know who that reminds me of? Josiah – my son. I bet if he were a prophet he would do that – right in the middle of a vision of heaven he would start making suggestions for the vision.

"Hey, how about something for his head?"

45

But the really funny thing is that God goes along with it and throws that into the vision.

So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

6 The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: 7 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

In other words God says, "I've taken care of your past sins. But I'm putting the responsibility on you now to walk in My ways."

46

Jesus calls to mind this passage, but shifts the last part. Instead of talking about just walking in His ways, He says **they will walk with Me.**

Isn't that a wonderful image? I don't know how that strikes you, because I know some people don't care for going on walks. But I love walking with people. That's my favorite way to spend time with someone that I want to talk to.

My favorite part of the day each day is when Tracy and I go on our walk every night after supper. There is something about it that makes our conversation flow more freely than if we are driving in the car or sitting at home or eating a meal.

It's especially enjoyable walking with someone you love, or a close friend in a beautiful place. Just walking along and seeing all the beautiful things around you, combined with stimulating conversation can be such a blessed, refreshing experience.

The concept of being **dressed in white** is common in Revelation and it refers to sinlessness in the sight of God – the condition of having been made clean by God in His sight. (Justification)

48

(Also in the background of their culture is the unmistakable connotation of festivity, joy and triumph that also went along with white garments).

When Tracy and I have our walk, if I have a sin to confess or something on my conscience, it's not as enjoyable. But this picture here is of walking with a perfectly clean soul.

I don't know if you have ever been jealous of Adam, who walked with the Lord in the cool of the day, or Enoch, who walked with the Lord and the Lord so enjoyed it one day he just kept walking right up into heaven.

I don't know that any of these promises for the overcomers has quite the tug on my heart as this one.

for they are worthy.

That doesn't mean they earned or deserved their salvation – only that they were made worthy by Christ, and have done nothing to forfeit that.

49

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

Cards & brochures

- Pick up a visitor's pack
- Doughnuts (Next week come early)
- SS (Ruckus)
- Tapes, CDs, MSS
-
- Office for Tommy?
- Choir rehearsal
- Deacon meeting
-
- Remaining pictures (list)
-
- E-mail Bible study class
- Come to prayer once a month!
- Book club
- fellowship meal **cancelled** next week.
- Deacon meeting
- Bible study group 4:30
- Shepherd's conf. In March 5-9
- Fill in flow charts!
- Suggest tape cases
- Pick up your newsletter
- Applebees
- Thursday Bible study on Knowing God's will
- Tuesday Bible study on Knowing God's will
- Call people forward to pray

Benediction: Eph 3:17-19 I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.