

State of the Church (Revelation 3:1–6)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (12/8/2019)

Introduction

1. Why this message?
 - a. The year is ending and a new one is before us, making this a great time to review.
 - b. The pastor's age makes planning for succession advisable.
 - c. Continuing struggles with attendance and lack of willing servants demands investigation.
 - d. The current condition of the church in general and the impending threat of real persecution looms and suggests the need for preparation.
2. This message is *not* meant to be negative, but—
 - a. We need to be *reminded* of God's purpose for the church and whether we are living up to it.
 - b. We need to be *encouraged* by the glorious victory assured in Christ and rejoice.
 - c. We need to be *warned* of Satan's ongoing scheme to destroy the saints and the church and be vigilant.
 - d. We need to *pursue* the Spirit of God to search and examine our hearts and devotion to Christ and His will for us and repent and correct, if necessary.
3. Why Sardis as a backdrop for this discussion?
 - a. I would argue that what is written of Sardis fits many churches in our time.
 - b. We ought to be willing to humble ourselves and seek His face to ascertain His assessment of our condition and His will for our future.
 - c. When I have explained what I learned in my study of Sardis, you will understand why I chose the church at Sardis for this message.

I. Sardis

1. What is the worst thing that can be said about a church? "*You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*"
 - a. Some argue that being "dead" was a spiritual state and that the membership was largely unconverted.
 - b. On the other hand, the text itself argues that the church's condition was due to "sleep," leaving the church unconscious of her true state and failure in her divine mission.
2. Sardis's condition was a symptom of disobedience from which the church *could recover*, as is evident from the following:
 - a. Jesus presented Himself to the church as sufficient to supply whatever was needed to revive and re-store vitality. The seven Spirits of God (1:4) is an OT figure of the *fullness* of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). The seven *stars* (1:16, 20) point to the full authority of Jesus to rule and manage His churches.
 - b. The response the Lord expected to His rebuke was that the church would *wake up*, suggesting that she was asleep and not dead dead.
 - c. Those spiritually dead have no good works, but Jesus saw that the church's works were incomplete.
 - d. That some had not soiled their garments implies that the rest had the same garments but *soiled* and in need of cleansing and restoration.
 - e. Conclusion: the church needed to awake out of spiritual *lethargy*, not spiritual death.
3. What caused Sardis to fall into the condition described?
 - a. Jesus does not explain the cause.

- b. Sardis was neither commended nor criticized, only charged with the awful state of being totally un-aware of her sad condition. Sardis was asleep and, consequently, unfruitful, having evidence of life (leaves) but unable to fulfill the purpose and design (no fruit) to which she was created, and thus worthless to God.
4. Although charged with the severest indictment of the seven churches, there remained a remnant of faithful followers within the church.
 - a. The faithful were promised that because they were worthy and would walk with Him in white.
 - b. Overcomers, those who heard His words and repented, would also be clothed in white, being assured of permanent enrollment in the book of life.
 5. The promise that the overcomers' names would never be blotted out of the book of life needs explanation. It cannot mean possible loss of salvation.
 - a. Contrary to popular evangelical teaching, one's name is not added to the book of life at conversion.
 - b. Names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world (17:8).
 - c. Revelation consistently affirms that those about to be punished were those whose names were never in the book of life (13:8).
 - d. The Lamb's book of life represents only those whom the Father chose in Christ for salvation. The Father wrote their names in the book before the foundation of the world, and Jesus went to the cross to secure their eternal life.
 - e. How does one know that his name is in the book? He will be among the faithful obedient or the awakened overcomers. A disobedient believer will wake up from spiritual slumber, strengthen what remains, and complete the works God has assigned to him.

II. Problems

1. If Jesus has already won the victory (and He has), why do churches find themselves characterized by the issues revealed in the churches of Revelation? The Lord will correct His church before He returns.
 - a. *"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"* (Hebrews 12:7).
 - b. Trials separate *overcomers* from false professors.
 - c. Trials strengthen and develop overcomers as they grow spiritually, dying to self and flesh (1 Peter 4:12, 13, 17, 18).
2. *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (v. 6). The Lord warned, *"Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent"* (v. 3). Are we listening?

III. What is a Church?

1. The church is an assembly of Christ followers who have been born from above and filled with His Spirit.
 - a. These believers hear His Word and desire to obey it fully because the Lord is everything to them.
 - b. They love the Lord and each other, working to glorify His name by encouraging each other to be more like Jesus in everything they do.
 - c. They stand against the wiles of Satan, false teaching, and the lure of worldliness.
2. Observe this snapshot of the first church basking in the aftermath of Pentecost (Acts 2:42–47).

What to Take Away

I close with two passages, first, 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17. Note three things: God's purpose to save us; our required obedience, and our encouragement. Second, Hebrews 10:19–24