

## Revelation 3:1-6 Walk Worthy in White

### Review:

**Outline:** The book of Revelation has 22 chapters and can be divided into two parts (**1:19**):  
Chapter 1-3—"things ... that are" (Epistles to the Seven Churches)  
Chapters 4–22—"things ... that are to take place after this" (Prophecy)

My premise is that the things "that are" are now things that *were*, and even the things that "are to take place" are now things have *already* taken place (a position known as orthodox preterism).

### Performance Review: Sardis The Church That Was Dead

**Joke:** *What do you call people from Sardis?* Sardines!

### Sardis:

- 1) Lies in ruins today. It survived until A.D. 1402 when it was captured and destroyed by an invading Turkish warlord.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) Was located 30 miles southeast of Thyatira and 50 miles due east of Smyrna.<sup>2</sup> On a clock dial, it would be 3:00 (Ephesus at 7:00, Smyrna at 9:00, Pergamum at 11:00, and Thyatira at 1:00).
- 3) Claimed to be the place where the art of dying wool was first discovered.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) Hundreds of years prior to John's letter, it had been capital of a pre-Greek empire. The Greatest king to live there was Croesus and under him Sardis was at the height of its wealth ("rich as Croesus").<sup>4</sup>
- 5) Was situated atop a 1,500 feet high hill with nearly perpendicular rock walls on 3 sides, yet ancient history records that it was conquered twice through carelessness. They were so sure of being unconquerable that watchmen were not stationed at critical points, allowing elite commando-like forces to scale the rock wall and capture the city.<sup>5</sup> This hill has since eroded and is now much lower and quite narrow.

### 3:1a

\*\*\*\***How did Jesus describe Himself in 3:1a?** Jesus described Himself as He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars (references back to **1:4, 20**). This, of course, is somehow relevant to the situation in Sardis.

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<sup>1</sup> "Sardis", Wikipedia.org Accessed December 29, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "Interactive Map of the Seven Churches in Revelation," About-Jesus.org. Accessed December 29, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mouce, *Revelation*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> Barclay, *Revelation*, 142- 144.

<sup>5</sup> Barclay, *Revelation*, 142- 144.

**Review: What is the interpretation of the seven spirits and seven stars (3:1)? What relevance did it have to this particular church?** See 1:4, 20. Seven is the number of completion. The idea of seven Spirits is evidently a symbolic way to refer to a complete and perfect measure of the Holy Spirit in each of the seven churches. The seven stars represent the churches' "angels," which sadly went unexplained. The angels evidently represent each church's true identity.<sup>6</sup>

**Why would Jesus describe Himself the way He did in 3:1?** Perhaps it was to remind the Sardis church that Jesus was in a position to very well what was going on in each church. For example, Jesus began each letter with the words "I know." Thus, He also said to Sardis, "I know your works...."

**Application:** Although Jesus is not with us physically, the Holy Spirit (symbolically represented by the seven spirits) is still with us and each church's true identity (star/angel) is known to Him.

### 3:1b

**\*\*\*\*Why was Jesus not happy with the church in Sardis (3:1)?** Though the Sardinians outwardly looked alive, Jesus knew that they were in reality dead on the inside. Spiritually, these people were no more than living corpses. Of the seven churches, Sardis got the worst report card. It is a lot easier to cool down a fanatic than to warm up a corpse.<sup>7</sup>

**Would you name your child Jezebel or Judas? Why not?** Amazingly, there are three Baptist churches in the Atlanta area named Sardis Baptist Church. One wonders how biblically literate their founders were (or, perhaps it was simply a matter of truth in advertising!).

**Nothing To See Here, Folks, Keep Moving:** Unlike the other churches, there was no mention of false teachers, or immorality, or persecution. The problem is that they were near death spiritually. There is no reason for Satan to attack it! It has been said that the biggest cult is the cult of the comfortable.<sup>8</sup> Paul warns of people who have:

ESV 2 Timothy 3:5 ... appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

**What alarm should the Sardis' situation (3:1) sound about our church?** Beautiful buildings and multitudes of programs do not a live church make! Some churches are merely morgues with steeples.<sup>9</sup> We must recognize that some churches that we look up to as examples of growing, vibrant Christianity may, in reality, be quite dead. Many churches are like the widow described by Paul who:

ESV 1 Timothy 5:6 ... is dead even while she lives.

ESV Matthew 23:27 [Jesus said] ... you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

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<sup>6</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2467.

<sup>7</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 274.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>9</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Letters to Churches* (study booklet, Insight for Living Ministries), 17.

**Speculation: What are some indicators of a dead church today?** Some indicators of a dead church might include toleration for open sin, not caring for each other, prayerlessness, the loss of evangelistic zeal, a greater commitment to ceremony than to Christ, dully following rote liturgy, more concern with form than substance, a resistance to change, or an unhealthy commitment to past traditions.

### 3:2

\*\*\*\***What cure did Jesus offer the church at Sardis (3:2)?** He called for them to **1) wake up**, and **2) strengthen what remains**.

**1) My grandfather worked for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad in Birmingham back before World-War Two. He told the story of a switchman named John found asleep at his post. When confronted by the foreman, John didn't move a muscle, but said that no, he was not asleep, he was just watching ants on the ground. The foreman said he didn't see any ants, to which John replied, "The last one just went down that hole!" What is it the church needed to "wake up" from (3:2)?** They needed to "wake up" to the fact that they were dead despite outward appearances. Some people come to church with a sign around their neck: "Do not disturb."<sup>10</sup> Before any problem can be solved there must first be an admission that there is indeed a problem and then the problem itself must be identified.

**Historical Context:** It has been suggested that a better translation than "wake up" would be "show yourself watchful."<sup>11</sup> Twice in its history prior to John's writing, the city of Sardis had been captured by an invading army because its watchmen had been absent from their posts. They were simply not watching. The church was similarly lax; lethargy had crept in unnoticed. Jesus wanted them to be watchful and recognize the problem.

**2) What were they supposed to do once they awoke (3:2); wake up and do what?** They were to wake up and strengthen what remained of the little that was left alive. There was some hope. The EEG still registered a little brain activity. They were in a deep spiritual coma.

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:34** Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.

ESV **Ephesians 5:14** "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

**According to 3:2, what was true of even of the things that were still alive?** They, too, were "about to die." There evidently was only a small faithful remnant left, and even they were not far from extermination.

**Example:** One Christmas we bought a beautiful poinsettia. However, it soon wilted and died, except for one pitiful stalk and leaf. My wife tried to strengthen what remained, but even it was clearly about to die!

**What did Jesus say about their works in 3:2?** See *James 2:17*. He said that their deeds were not complete in God's sight.

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<sup>10</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 273.

<sup>11</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 110.

ESV **James 2:17** . . . faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

**Application:** Even though we are saved by grace, anyone who has truly experienced God's grace will start to produce good works. Don't think of our relationship with God as strictly one way; Jesus expects us to be involved in "works" that are "complete." *What do you do for the Lord? What is your ministry? Are your works complete?*

ESV **Matthew 3:8** Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

ESV **John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit ...

### 3:3

**What further instructions did Jesus have for Sardis (3:3)?** They were to **1)** remember (*mnemoneuo*) what they had received, **2)** keep what they had received, and **3)** repent.

**1) They were to remember what they had received and heard (3:3); what had they received and hears?** Perhaps it refers to the immediate message of **3:1-2** (their incomplete works), or perhaps it refers back to the original time they heard about and believed in Jesus.

**How is it that remembering something can help rekindle passion (3:3)?** Time dulls our memory and the sensations we felt at first. However, seeing something that reminds us of the past can bring back forgotten feelings.

**Example:** When veterans revisit a battle site, even after fifty years, they are often over-taken by long-suppressed feelings and emotions.

**2) What does it mean to "keep it" (3:3)?** It means they were to keep on remembering and also act on the information (obey), revive the church and complete their complete works.

**3) What does "repent" (3:3) mean?** "Repent" is from *metanoeo* (3340); *meta* means "change" and *noeo* means "to think." Thus, it is "a change of thinking" that leads to a change of action. Religion without repentance is repugnant to God.<sup>12</sup>

**What did Jesus warn would happen if they did not wake up (3:3b)?** Jesus warned He would "come" to them.

**What is the significance of coming "like a thief" (3:3)?** Thieves come secretly, unannounced, and unexpectedly and a loss is suffered.

**Would Jesus coming like a thief be good thing or a bad thing (3:3)? Why?** Jesus would not merely be coming *to* them; rather, He said He would come "against" them. From the context, it clearly would be bad for them. It would be a time of judgment. This coming was like when a parent says to noisy children in another room, "Don't make me come in there!" (Not a good thing).

Other places in the Bible compare Jesus' other comings to that of a thief in the night:

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<sup>12</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 268.

ESV **Matthew 24:42-44** ... stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:2, 6** ... the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.... So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

ESV **2 Peter 3:10** ... the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

**Does this coming of Jesus (3:3) refer to 1) the actual second coming, 2) the A.D. 70 Jerusalem coming against Jerusalem coming, or 3) a personalized coming against Sardis? Why?** Though the actual second coming will be like a thief in the night (unexpected), this is merely a reference to an unexpected localized judgment coming of Jesus against the church in Sardis. Neither the second coming nor the Jerusalem coming were dependent on the response of the church in Sardis (“if you will not wake up”).

### 3:4-5

**\*\*\*\*A few believers in Sardis had name recognition with Jesus; which ones (3:4-5)?** Jesus knew the names of those few who had not soiled their garments.

**Spiritually, what does it mean to have soiled garments (3:4)?** It is noteworthy that the dying of wool was a principle trade in Sardis.<sup>13</sup> Literal soiled garments are dirty clothes. Spiritually, this would generally refer to sin in one’s life.

ESV **James 1:27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is ... to keep oneself unstained from the world.

**What did Jesus promise to those whose did not soil their garments (3:4)?** He promised that they would “walk with me.”

**What does it mean to walk with Jesus (3:4)?** It means your faith in Him is vibrant and your daily relationship with Him is vital.

ESV **1 John 1:6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

**Why do brides wear white at weddings?** A bride wears white in symbolism of her purity.

**Jesus promised that they will walk worthy in white. Why white (3:4)?** A spotlessly white garment is the opposite of a soiled garment. White clothes are symbolic of righteousness, and Jesus declared them “worthy” (3:4b).

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<sup>13</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 112.

Thus, the white clothes promised constitute attire appropriate for the heavenly state, and represent righteousness:

ESV **Revelation 7:14** They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

**In 3:5, what else did Jesus promise to the one who conquers?** Jesus promised to clothe him in white garments and to never blot his name out of the book of life.

• **“blot out” (3:5):** From *exaleipho*, to erase, to wipe away, to remove.

**In 3:5, what is it that Jesus wanted them to conquer?** Jesus wanted them to continue to conquer sin in their lives, avoid the stain of the world, conquer the “deadness” of nominal Christianity, and conquer the lack of good works.

ESV **Matthew 24:13** ... the one who endures to the end will be saved.

**What is the “book of life” (3:5)?** It is a book containing the names of all who are worthy to enter heaven. Starting with Moses, the Jews had the idea that God kept books on people:

ESV **Exodus 32:31-33** ... Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book."

ESV **Malachi 3:17** Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.

ESV **Revelation 20:15** ... if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**Does the promise to not erase a name from the book of life suggest that others might have their names blotted out? Why?** It might suggest on the surface that names could be blotted out, but this is actually a guarantee that their names will *not* be erased.

ESV **John 10:28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish ...

**What does it mean for Jesus to confess your name before the Father and the angels (3:5b)? What is the significance of that?** It means that Jesus is claiming you as His own.

ESV **Matthew 10:32** ... everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

### 3:6 So What?

\*\*\*\***What is the literary function of 3:6?** The purpose of 3:6 is to show that the warning to Sardis applies to all churches everywhere, in every time. Be aware that some churches that have a reputation of life are in fact dead. Be aware that what happened in Sardis can happen anywhere. Listen to what Jesus said to Sardis and be willing to wake up and change. Get everybody to love Jesus, and you'll have a wonderful church ... they don't have to agree on anything else!<sup>14</sup>

**What are the five key commands that Jesus gave the Sardis church?** Wake up, strengthen what remains, remember what you received, keep it, and repent. As the athletic advertisement says, "Just do it."

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

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<sup>14</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 271.