

DO SOMETHING!

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Scripture: Revelation 3: 1-6

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3 *“And to the ^[a]angel of the church in Sardis write,*

‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you shall not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you. ⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ He that overcomes same shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

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

Father, we thank You for this morning, for the provisions that You have made for us. and now, Lord, as we come to worship You and to hear Your word, we pray that You would prepare our hearts, open our understanding, open our ears, and let the word of God do its work in our lives. May none of us go back the same way but we might go back transformed, empowered, edified, and with a new spring in our steps. I commit myself into Your hands, pray that You would sanctify, that You would clothe Yourself with me. Use me as Your instrument and bless us we pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

We have been studying the letters to the seven churches. We finished four churches and today we’re going to have a look at the letter to the fifth church which is, the church at Sardis.

All about the city of Sardis.

Where is Sardis? Sardis is about 30-40 miles to the east of Smyrna. It’s in modern Turkey. What kind of a place was Sardis? Sardis was one of the chief cities of Asia Minor. It was the capital of Lydia, one of the richest places about 700 years ago. When it reached the peak of its glory, there was plenty of money. It was on the trade routes. It had a big temple where a goddess idol was worshipped. It was a place known for its abundance, a place known for immorality, a place that was a by-word even among the unbelievers of that day. By-word not for good, but for bad. It is said that it was probably the first city in this part of the world to have turned to Christ; it was perhaps the first city to turn away from Christ subsequently. By the time this letter comes to this church, the city was well on its way down.

Sardis was built upon a plateau. There were steep cliffs that you had to climb if you wanted to get into the city. If you didn’t know the way, there was no way you could get there. You couldn’t climb up because the slopes were slippery. But there was a hidden trail there that only those who stayed inside knew. That was the only way up. There were many who came to attack and conquer; none of them could breach the defenses. So the people of Sardis had become slack; they had ceased to watch. The watchmen were sleeping. The embankments, the city walls were not guarded.

And in 549 BC, Cyrus of Persia came to attack Sardis. When he came near, he found that the city was unconquerable, unreachable. So he offered a huge prize money to anybody who would show them the way up, and would enable them to conquer Sardis. One day, one of his soldiers was watching carefully, and he noticed that one of the Sardis soldiers dropped his helmet over the wall by mistake. Then he gingerly climbed down the hidden trail, picked up his helmet and went up again. This soldier came to realize that there was a way. That same night, he led the army up the trail, and when they reached the city walls, they found it unguarded. The watchmen were sleeping; none of them expected that the enemy could find a way up. You can imagine what ensued. Cyrus and his soldiers destroyed that city, plundered it, and took away the loot, all the riches thereof. They took away the king as well.

Now, one would think that after this, they would have learned their lesson. Not so. 330 odd years later, Antiochus III came, and the same story recurred. These people were still sleeping, still slack. They had not learned the lesson from history. Once more they were caught napping. The king and his soldiers climbed up through that hidden trail again, and the city was destroyed one more time. Today, it is a very sad residue of what it once was. It's a small village in Turkey called Sart, and there is nothing much to speak about except some livestock, a few farmers and such. No king. Today, in that place where there was a thriving church at one time, it is said that there is not a singly Christian. So, that's the story of Sardis.

The Church of Sardis

What about the Church of Sardis when this letter was addressed to them? I said just now, that the city had become slack, flabby, without muscle, without any backbone, nothing to talk about. And this situation come into the church as well. The church had forgotten the message that they first heard; they had become slack as well. What happens when these things are given a room to grow? The church became flabby.

I've seen this happening in church after church, generation after generation, denomination after denomination. The first generation of believers is on fire for God; the second becomes flat, the third starts going down. I've seen this again and again and again. This is what was happening in the church at Sardis as well. The church, or whatever remained of it was weak, lifeless. When I say lifeless, I need to qualify that statement. It was not as though there was no church, no buildings, no people, no programs. All of these were there. Perhaps it was a church full of activity and yet no life. It is possible to have a church full of activity, full of people, every seat occupied, having a program every day of the week, and yet be a dead church. That was Sardis. And the word of God came to them. It's very surprising to see how the word begins.

If you read the seven churches, you find that there is a structure in every one of those letters. It starts with the Lord introducing who He is. Then He commends them for what is good in their church. He corrects them for what needs to be set right. Finally He gives a promise to them that overcome.

But to the church at Sardis, there is no commendation, nothing to praise them for. He starts off introducing Himself and straight away gets into the correction. You'll also notice that if you read through this letter, He does not correct them for their wrong doctrines. He doesn't correct them for becoming a little slack. None of those things. You'll notice that in this church, the word of correction is almost a condemnation. It was that they were dead. You don't read about Nicolaitans here; you don't read about Jezebel here; you don't read about Balaam here. You don't find God correcting them for these things, not even a warning. It was a dead church.

What happens when a church dies?

The enemy stops attacking the church. There's no point wasting your resources. Any army general will tell you this – that he sends his best troops to fight against the enemy at their strongest point. He doesn't waste his resources in a place where there is no resistance. In any case, he can overpower them. So, we don't find the enemy very active here; they were already dead. And in this background, the Word comes to them saying these things, that He has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The seven stars, we know from ch. 1, represents the seven churches.

What is he trying to convey here?

The Lord Jesus is the Lord and Master of Heaven and earth. He has the fullness of the Spirit. Seven denotes fullness. He has the fullness of the Spirit and the mastery of the churches. He's the Lord of the churches as well. We know the universal church is the body of Christ. He is the head, so He introduces Himself and then straightaway gets into what He has to convey to them.

"I know your works, that you have a name, that you are alive, but you are dead."

Now the word used for alive here is a Greek word which denotes the inner life. there are two words – inner life and the outer physical life that we can see. He says, "You have a name, that you have an inner life." Probably Christians of those days would have said, "Here is a live church. Here's a church you need to go and see, you need to be a part of them, how they worship, this music is wonderful, and so on. Maybe the preachers come from the most eminent theological colleges and they have the largest collection in their offering." I don't know what all they would have said, but there was no inner life.

The One who sees it all says, "You are dead." Do you know that our Lord has an eye that searches and that sees everything? Nothing is hidden from His eyes. Nothing. No matter where you go, no matter where you try to hide, He sees everything. He knows everything and He says, "I know your works." That means there are some works there. It's not that there's nothing, but they are dead works. I'm often reminded of this passage from 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, where Paul writing to the Corinthian church says that there is a foundation that has been laid, and no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. And then each one of us builds upon that foundation. Some of us build with gold and silver and precious stones, and some of us build works of wood, hay and stubble. All our works will be passed through the fire of God. If your works are works of wood, hay and stubble, they will burn. Nothing will remain. You may save your own soul but you'll have nothing left to show for what you have done in this life on the earth.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like when we go to heaven. You'll find some of these missionaries – mighty men and women, some of the evangelists who have won hundreds and thousands for the Lord, some of those who have sacrificed so much for the Lord. You'll find them being crowned, acknowledged publicly by the Lord, rewarded. And then some of us will go there with empty hands, nothing to show. Barely saved, nothing to show. Where will we hide our faces that day? Is this what the Lord deserves? The church at Sardis was one such church. They had works, but their works were not perfect before God, and the Lord says that this was a dead church.

What should they be doing?

He says, "Be watchful. Watch," and the word here translated in the English language, actually means keep watching. it's not a one-time or a short-time watching, but it is a constant unending permanent watching. If the soldiers at the border ceased to watch, what would happen?

In the book of Ezekiel, we read: Son of man, I have made you a watchman, and if you see the danger approaching and you do not warn my people, they will perish in their sins. But their blood will I require at your hands. Every single child of God is accountable to God, if for nothing else for yourself and for your family, you are accountable. And to those of us who are given a part in the ministry, we

are accountable for the souls of those whom God has entrusted to our care. We dare not be found sleeping.

What should we watch for?

Watch out for your own souls. Watch out that you don't become slack, you don't allow the enemy into your life. The city of Sardis was on a plateau which had steep cliffs; nobody could climb those cliffs except through that hidden trail. Many of us, especially those of us who have been Christians for any length of time, we tend to become slack. I know all this, I know the bible, I know how to pray, I have probably won some souls to the Lord. I've been used by the Lord so I know all this. And we may be caught napping. The enemy knows that weak point in your life and mine. He knows, he's watching all the time. And you can be sure he will attack you at your weakest point.

So what He says to the Church at Sardis, He says to us today. "Watch. You can never let your guard down. When you're on the battlefield, you can never ever let your guard down." That's the word that He brings here. Stand firm in your faith. Watch against the wiles of the devil. Watch against temptation, watch against false teaching, watch for the coming of the Lord. Do you know He's coming again? I believe ours is the last generation. This is my personal belief. We don't have much time left. Very soon you will hear the last trumpet and the Lord will come in the skies to take His own unto Himself. Are you ready?

The New Testament keeps warning us again and again to be on watch. That word comes to us repeatedly, and that's the word which was given to the church at Sardis. Be watchful, strengthen the things that remain, that are about to die. There's still a flicker of a flame. At one time it was probably a blaze; now there are embers. Fan them into flames. That's what Paul says to Timothy: "Remember the gift which you have received by the laying on of hands, and fan into flames the embers that are within you." Are you a man or a woman who had received a word, an anointing, a ministry from the Lord, and have neglected it. This word comes to you today: Fan into flames those embers which are there. strengthen those things that remain.

You have to appear before the Lord very soon to give an account for what you have done with what He entrusted to your care. And we dare not be like that servant who went and hid that one talent in the ground. What did he say? "I was afraid so I went and hid it."

Do something

I don't know how many of us are afraid to go out in the Lord's name to do something for the Lord. do something. I'm sure we can do something. All of us might not be great soul winners, but surely you can do something. Strengthen the things that remain. There's a series of imperatives here.

v. 3 says, "Remember what you have received and heard. Hold fast and repent."

Remember the things you have heard. We need to keep going back to the cross. There's nothing like the cross to keep us humble, to keep us committed, to keep us separated from the world. That's one of the reasons I believe the Holy Communion has been given to us. Every time we come to the Lord's table, we are supposed to search our own hearts. Humble ourselves. "Do these things in remembrance of Me." For every time you come together and celebrate the Lord's Supper you show forth His death until He comes again. remember and hold fast; strengthen.

Then He says: Repent. Repent is a beautiful word which has unfortunately become a bad word today in the church. Nobody likes to be told to repent. But if you read church history, you find that when the evangelists of old were preaching, men like John Wesley, George Whitfield, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Finny, Moody, so many of them – mighty men of God. There would always be repentance, confession and then faith. There's no salvation without repentance, and I think we need to re-emphasize some of these basics of the Christian faith. Today we are living in days where we just want

to say that 2-minute prayer and say I have accepted the Lord, then go away feeling good about ourselves as though we have done God an honor by accepting Him. But there's no change in our life and we go back, live the same. Is that what the Bible talks about? "If any man be in Christ, he's a new creature, the old things have passed away. Behold all things have become new." The only way you can know whether a person is born again or not is by watching their life. By their fruits you shall know them. That's the only way. And if the life doesn't match with what they profess, there's a problem. Repent, and if you do not watch, I will come on you as a thief.

Now remember, this is a letter which is addressed to the church at Sardis. On at least two occasions they were caught napping because they were not watchful. Two kings, Cyrus in 549 BC, and Antiochus III in 214 BC, had come through that hidden trail, attacked, destroyed and plundered the city. Why? Because they were not watchful. Because they thought that their defenses were impregnable. They thought that nothing can go wrong. When you allow this kind of thinking, you can be sure that disaster is near. Just when you think you are safe, the enemy attacks. So repent, hold fast, watch or else I'll come to you as a thief and you will not know when I'll come.

Rewards.

1. The Garments of Righteousness

And then He said something good. You have a few names there, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments. We read in the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira that there were a few evil people within the church among the good believers. But here, everybody was dead. There were a few who were walking with God. The exact opposite. To them He says, "You have a few people who are good who have not defiled their garments; they shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy."

In vs.4 and 5, there are three rewards which are specifically promises to these people to the overcomers. What are these? They shall be clothed in white. These are the garments of righteousness that nobody can earn. You can't go to a shop and buy them. You can't work your way to righteousness. This is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

At the cross, there was a transaction that took place. For some of us it is in the past, while for some of us probably it's in the future, or probably in the present. We keep reading about these exchange offers. Bring your old television, take back a new one. exchange your old car for a new one. Do you know what happened at the cross? What is the call that rings out to us from the cross? Bring your sins; take back righteousness. Come with your misery; go back with hope. Come with your old life; go back with a newness. That's the greatest exchange offer at the cross.

2 Corinthians 5:21 "He (God the Father) made Him (God the Son) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

That's the greatest exchange offer – the Father put all your sins and mine upon His Son. He put His righteousness upon us. that's what happened at the Cross. And that's why we are worthy, that's why we get the garments of salvation.

2. Their names will not be wiped out of the book of life.

I will not blot out their names, He says. Do you know that He has a book, the book of life in which the name of every man, woman and child who is born again is entered? Just like in those days they had a citizenship record. Every city had its own register. All the citizens' names were written therein, and if any man died, his name would be blotted out. If any man committed a grievous crime for which he was going to be executed, his name would be blotted out. So the book of life is a register of the citizens of heaven. He says, "I will not blot out your name. You're there."

3. I will confess their names.

This is the best of all. I will confess their name before My Father and before His holy angels. I remember when I turned to the Lord, there was chaos at home. weeping, mourning, shouting, screaming. Some of us who are born and raised in Christian homes, we have no idea of what it means to take a stand for the Lord. Parents are happy if you say, "I have turned to the Lord and I want to get baptized." But for those who come from non-Christian backgrounds, life is totally different. I was disowned. We had plenty of property. I was told, "You leave your Christ and your religion, and all this will come to you." I said, "Thank you, but I don't need these things. I cannot leave my Christ." What all happened thereafter is a different story. Psalm 27:10 "When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." That's what happened to me. Here the Lord says, "Forget about what the world says. I will confess you name before My Father and before His holy angels." What can be greater than that!

In this world, you might be nobody's. but you are not a nobody; you are a somebody with a capital S. You are a child of the Living God. You are a prince and a princess. You're not nobody. The Lord Jesus, Himself, is waiting to be publicly acknowledged and crowned. He's been waiting for 2000 years. can't you wait a little while before the Lord owns you and crowns you and exalts you. Now is the time for us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. The time is coming when He'll exalt you and He will be a ruler over many nations, many cities. He says, "I will confess them, their name before My Father, and before His holy angels." Wonderful! What could be greater!

Closing.

He closes, saying, "He that has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches."

What is it that the Lord is telling us today?

Are we superficial Christians? Are we people that have a form of godliness but no power thereof? I remember reading about Pastor Shi of China who lived in the previous generation. He was a man so full of the Spirit of God, the devils would quake in from of him. I remember reading one incident. There was a possessed man in a certain room, and somebody had called Pastor Shi to come and deliver this man who was possessed. Even as he was approaching, this possessed man started crying out, "Pastor Shi is coming. Pastor Shi is coming." If you are a child of God, the devil should tremble before you.

I had an experience when I was going with another brother for a deliverance ministry. We were in Delhi 20 km away, driving from South Delhi to North Delhi, and this possessed man was crying out: These two men are coming now. They've reached so-and-so place. Now they've reached here." He was giving a commentary 20 km away. They acknowledge you; they know who you are. You remember the incident of the sons of Sceva? "Jesus, I know, and Paul I know. But who are you?" If you are a child of God, you are recognized by Heaven, by the angels, also by the devils. And they will tremble if you are walking with God. Are you a fake Christian or are you one who's walking with God today?

We sang 'He sits on the Mercy Seat.' In the ark, there were three things – the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, Aaron's rod which had budded, and the pot of manna. On the top of the ark was the mercy seat, and the cherubim were there. God's presence was in the midst of the cherubim. There was an occasion when the ark was being transported to Jerusalem, and people tried to lift the mercy seat and peep inside. The Lord struck them and they died. When there is no mercy, you try to live by the Commandments, and the commandments kill. You shall not, you shall not, you shall not. cursed is anyone who does not keep the words of the law. Nobody can live, nobody can follow. Thank God for the mercy seat which covers, and the blood is sprinkled on the

mercy seat. He sits on the mercy seat and because of that, you and I can approach Him; we can enter the holy of holies.

Do we ponder about some of these songs that we sin. "Christ the servant King. He came not to be served, but to serve. He calls us to follow Him."

Are we following Him today? What does it mean to follow Him? And talking of the mercy seat, there are millions who are outside the fold who are trying to earn their salvation. Some of course, can't be bothered. But there are many who are trying to earn their salvation through works. Do they know about the mercy seat? Do they know about the One who has already paid the ransom price through whom, and whom alone, they can be saved?

Romans 10:13-15 says, "Everyone that calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how shall they call upon Him of whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach unless they be sent?"

Are you a witnesser? When was the last time you witnessed to somebody about the Lord Jesus? Oswald J Smith was a mighty man of God who founded the People's Church in Toronto. He was a man with a passion for missions. He said, "Either go or send. There's no other option." If you call yourself a Christian, go or send; there's no third option. You and I have been called by God, commissioned by God, to go out as His ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are ambassadors of Christ and we beseech you in Christ's name, be reconciled unto God." That's the ministry of reconciliation given to you and me. We are not called to come, sit, listen and go back, and forget about this. Oh, 1 hour is over. I have to get on with my life. we are not called to that kind of a life. We are accountable for everything that God gives us. Paul says, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Do we have a single mark? Have we done anything for Him?

Years ago, I was in seminary, and we had many bible college students there. One of the best things there was that you could meet with people and get to know their stories. There was this man from Kerala who had gone as a missionary to Rajasthan. There he was living, ministering. He had learned the language. Many souls turned to the Lord through his ministry. This aroused some fundamentalists who caught hold of him. One day a big gang descended upon him with sticks and rods; they beat him black and blue with iron rods as well. He says, "Even so many years later, my bones still ache from that beating." One would have expected the police to come and rescue him. But instead, the police lodged a case against him and not against those who behaved so shamefully. They put him in prison. He says, "In prison, I realized that this is a wonderful opportunity to preach the gospel," and he started sharing the good news. The prisoners started turning to Christ, and ultimately the jailer said, "It is dangerous. We should not keep him here." So he was released.

There are people who have gone through so much. As I was listening to his story, I hung my head in shame. I thought how I had done nothing for the Lord Jesus. What have you done for the Lord? That's a question I want you to go back home and ponder over. What have you done for the Lord Jesus? Do something. At least give a glass of cold water to somebody in the name of the Lord Jesus. Something. We cannot be sitting doing nothing. We are accountable. Be watchful or else I will come as a thief in the night. You may not lose your salvation if you're born again. I'm not talking about that, but have you done anything for the Lord."

On that day when you see these great men of God standing there being publicly acclaimed and rewarded, and you go there empty-handed, how would you feel? He says, "I gave My life for you; what have you given to Me?"

Here are the lyrics of one song, and I would urge each one of you to seriously ponder over this. The Church at Sardis is very much a letter to us today. We are living in days when the church has become slack, flabby, no prayer, no sacrifice, no obedience. It seems to be all about what can I get if I go to church. It's not about what can I do, what can I give.

"Must I go, and empty handed,"
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,
Lay no trophy at His feet?

"Must I go, and empty handed?"
Must I meet my Savior so?
Not one soul with which to greet Him:
Must I empty handed go?

Not at death I shrink or falter,
For my Savior saves me now;
But to meet Him empty-handed,
Thought of that now clouds my brow.

O the years in sinning wasted,
Could I but recall them now,
I would give them to my Savior,
To His will I'd gladly bow.

O ye saints, arouse, be earnest,
Up and work while yet 'tis day;
Ere the night of death o'ertake you,
Strive for souls while still you may.

It's my earnest plea to you, and a sincere prayer for each one of you, that we get to mean business with God. The time for playing is over. We are on the battlefield whether you realize it or not, and the Lord's coming is very near. Get serious, mean business for the Lord. live out your faith. May the Lord meet with each one of us, transform us, give us a new vision, a new zeal, a new fire. The people of God should be on fire. He's a God who revealed Himself through the fire. He says, "Is not My word like a fire?" And should not His people be ablaze with the fire of God?

Amen.
