

NASB 1977 Sardis, The Rotting Decomposing Dead Church That Smells
Revelation 3:1 - 6

I “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. 2 ‘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. 3 ‘Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 4 ‘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. 5 ‘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. 6 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

We are again this morning in the book of Revelation studying these letters from Jesus written to the seven churches in Asia minor, which would now be Turkey.

And you might think to yourself, is this level of seriousness appropriate for today on the day when we are celebrating the beautiful historic St. Marks P. E. Church building?

And I would remind you, again, that the building survived, but the church that built the building did not.

These letters are stern reminders that Christ Himself shuts churches down and removes their lampstands when they do not walk in love and obedience according to His commands.

The church, the true church that is the representation of Jesus Christ, on earth, is His body. There is a distinct connection to Jesus, and therefore a

distinct separation from this world. How distinct?

On the evening before His arrest and trials and death, in the upper room, this is what Jesus told the disciples about the distinctive nature of following Him. It applies to every christian, and it must be the corporate image of the true church in the world; John 15:18,19

18 If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me first. 19 If you were of the world, it would love you as its own. Instead, the world hates you, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

That's as good a definition of real christianity as you'll find anywhere in the Bible. Christians, real ones, are chosen by God, by Jesus, and removed from this world. In some sense we are taken out of this world. *you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world*

How is that true. Pinch yourselves, here we are. How am I chosen out of, gathered out of, harvested out of, this world that I am still in some sense a citizen of?

This world and every single person in it, is condemned. Blanket condemnation. Sin did that. Satan did that. We are under a condemnation not different from the one that resulted in the flood causing every single human to perish.

Judgement and hell for every breathing human. With this exception. Jesus has opened paradise, by His shed blood, for anyone who believes. Anyone who by faith in Christ's completed work for sinners, on the cross of Calvary, cries out to God for forgiveness and salvation, will in that moment be removed from the condemned family of sinners and placed into the body of Christ.

Does that sound like perhaps those two groups would be distinct from each other. One group is in warring rebellion mode taking terrorist pot shots at the God they hate. OBTW that describes the sweet old lady down the block

who has refused the gospel. The entire population of this world is in combat with God. War with God. Rebellion with God. Conflict with God who owns this world.

Second group, those christian believers who have been removed from that inclusive group and gathered into the bosom of Christ. True regenerated from death to life christians.

Two possible categories of humans. Those who Christ has redeemed, purchased, and removed to safety, spiritually, and those who are in rebellion. That's the only two possibilities.

So, again, does that definition sound as though, perhaps, the two groups would be distintively different from each other?

Throughout the Bible you find warnings. Friendship with this world is what? Enmity with God. God is in a war with this world. The only reason He doesn't finish the war is that He is selecting and redeeming people out of this world. When that mission is finished, well, we'll read about it in the rest of this book.

Ultimately, He returns to this world and does physical battle with the usurper Satan and takes back this world that He owns. He locks Satan up and rules on this earth for a millenium. Jesus. On David's throne. In Jerusalem. It will happen. A thousand years of peace, prosperity, and happiness under the rule of the true owner instead of the usurper, Satan.

But meanwhile, in these letters that describe every kind of individual christian, and every type of individual church during the church age, Jesus warns of what happens to individuals and churches who cozy up to the world that we remain in.

What happens when we make friends with this world that is in rebellion against God. What happens when those distinctions are blurred. When the church starts to look just like the world.

In these letters there has been a progression into exactly that. Progressive. We think that's a good word. The world thinks that's a good word. Incrementalism. Bit by bit movement in a direction away from something towards something is called progressivism. Incremental movement. It doesn't all happen on the same day. We leave the window cracked open and allow the world to come in a tiny bit at a time.

Pergamum. Well meaning and mostly faithful, but they tolerate evil. They tolerate error. They tolerate the world. They let the world in. The lines of distinction were blurred.

Thyatira. Swing the door open, come on in, world. They are fully engaged, fully in bed with the world.

Sardis. Dead to Christ. No distinction from the world. In fact they have so co-opted the idea of coming out of this world by faith and having your sins forgiven by the propitiatory blood of Jesus that no new Christians are even happening there. Dead. Drowned by the world.

That's the church we're going to study today.

This building survived 120 years in beautiful condition. The founding congregation and denomination has not. They married the world and they vanished.

It turns out, being indistinct from the world is not really an attraction to the world. Why go to a pretend church that is indistinct from the world around it, on a Sunday morning, when I could be washing the car. Mowing the lawn. Playing golf.

The church without Jesus, married to the world, indistinct from the world, has nothing real to offer. And then in the course of time, most of them get boarded up. My daughter Tina lives a house away from a church building much prettier than this one, occupied by some group that is trying to come

up with a restaurant business model that can somehow work in that space.

Churches without Jesus become empty cold stone quarries. These letters are warning shots for every church. Where are we, in comparison to Pergammum, or Thyatira, or Sardis, or Smyrna, or Ephesus. Or Philadelphia, or Laodicea.

Have we gotten so hyper about correct doctrine that love has been squeezed out? Are we loving and vibrant, but we're winking at some compromise with the world. Allowing some teensy compromise with the world to co-exist, in the church?

What about us would Jesus have to tell us to repent and change, if He were writing a letter to us. We seem strong at this moment, what will be the case in 120 more years? The building is simple and strong. It could easily survive. But will TCC just be a moment in it's historic narrative that was present and then vanished like St. Marks P. E. on the plaque we bought?

These are questions that we need to ask continuously. And the seven churches offer a full menu of both what Christ is pleased with and what He will punish and ultimately remove. The full spectrum of possibilities is modeled for us in these seven possibilities, and combinations there of.

So how are we doing? Are we OK. Compromised. In a consensual illegitimate relationship fully engaged. Dead. That's the order of decline from Pergammum, to Thyatira, to Sardis. Let's look at Sardis. Hold your nose. It's dead. As Martha said to Jesus, *by this time, he stinketh*. Luke 11
Dead things stink.

*I "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:
He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this*

This is the correspondent's identity. I get letters all the time. Junk mail. The correspondent has no interest or importance. Planet Nissan in Las Vegas wants to tell me something important. NOT.

We evaluate the importance of communication based on who the correspondent is and what relationship they have over us. I hate getting mail from the Internal Revenue Service. But I do read it. Planet Nissan goes in the trash. IRS gets read and evaluated. The correspondent associates the level of importance.

This writer identifies Himself as He who HAS the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.

OK easy first. The stars are the messngers who deliver the letters to the churches. They are the pastors of those congregations. He who is writing this communication owns them. That's what the greek word eh'-kho means. Possession. The writer owns the seven messengers or pastors. He HAS them.

He also possesses the seven fold Spirit of God. The Spirit is the AM when God says; I am that I am. God IS. And that power of being is in His Spirit.

Psalms 104:30 says; You send forth your Spirit; they are created. The Spirit is the breath of God that creates all things from nothing. Everything that is, has been created by God's Spirit, God's breath, God's being, God's Word. And Jesus possesses that breath of God.

This letter is from the one who breathes life or takes life away. He owns whether something is alive, or dead. He supplies life and He removes life. Therefore whether this church is alive or dead is directly connected to the One who breathes life into anything living and removes life at His will, by His Spirit.

This isn't junk mail. We had better listen.

1b 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, : 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

This church has a marque out front. A big stucco framed sign that faces the street in two directions and has bright lights that say; Abundant Life Meadows Church of the Brookside. It has a carefully chosen market choice name that sells well in it's designated community.

You drive by and there are fresh flowers blooming and the presentation is beautiful. And you think to yourself, that place has obviously got it going on.

The outward indication is life. But the inward reality is; Nobody's home. Spiritual connection to God through Christ has left the room. It's busy and the outward indications are that it's alive, but the inner reality is; *but you are dead.*

2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die;

It's not too late. Recovery is possible by the One who owns the breath of God. But you need to wake up and repent. The picture here is the same one that Jesus gave us in a parable.

Matthew 25. The 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom. 5 are ready and 5 miss the wedding.

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 "And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away

to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 “And later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 “But he answered and said, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

In this parable the oil in the lamps represents the life giving Holy Spirit. 5 have that connection and are ready when the bridegroom shouts. 5 do not.

The language in this letter to this church is reminiscent to this parable.
3b If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

What is it that makes one christian alive and ready and another who thinks they're OK, actually dead?

All of this is about life. Spiritual life. The indwelling Holy Spirit who quickens spiritually dead people to life. Regeneration from death to life, by the Holy Spirit of God. The miracle of life IN Christ.

This church has died. The majority of people who make up that congregation do not have Jesus. The marque has a name that sounds like life, but the reality is; This is the Abundant Life Meadows Church of the Tares.

The congregation is predominantly tares. A field of false wheat. It sways in the wind. It looks so good. But you get there to harvest it, and it's not wheat. It's just weeds that look like wheat. No value.

2 ‘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.

The second part of verse 2 is frightening. *I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.*

The process of christians reproducing christians like leaven that spreads life to every cell in the dough is stunted here. The process is incomplete. No new christians are happening. This is false christianity devoid of the living Christ.

They have stopped short of life. Someone comes into this church seeking God and the message here, is; Do stuff. It's a complete sacerdotal system of necessary things to do to be good enough to go to heaven. Do this stuff and you'll be fine. Eat this wafer and you'll be fine. It's Jesus actual body. Eat that and the magic will happen. Drink this stuff. It's Jesus actual blood. Drink it and you'll be fine. The magic will happen if you do stuff. Pray magic prayers over and over.

All of that stuff stops short of regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God dwelling inside your heart. It stops short of life. *I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.*

We have entire religions that have Jesus hanging all over the place with mountains of magic stuff to do for an entire lifetime that gives you false assurance that you're OK with God, and Jesus says; *I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.* **YIKES!**

3 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.

Looking at these churches in the timeline of history from Pentecost to today as prophetic eras, this verse describes the Protestant reformation. These words are exactly what Calvin and Luther did in the 1500's.

They remembered the original simple gospel. Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the scriptures, alone, for the glory of God. Alone. That's what the apostles gave to the church at the start.

Jesus says remember it, repent of where you are, and keep the *once for all delivered to the saints faith.* Jude 3 Choose between dead church religiosity,

or living faith.

If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

This is clearly an end times reference. Like Thyatira; *Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds*

And Pergammum; *‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*

The prophetic aspect of these churches in the church era reaches all the way to the tribulation. Cast her into great tribulation. I'll make war against them. or here; *wake up, (OR) I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.*

The Roman church will be present and this language will make sense at the rapture of the true church. Those warnings had meaning to the local congregations present in 96 AD and they have meaning if Jesus comes to remove His church in 2026. The language like the false church spans the eons of time.

If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

4 ‘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.

This is hopeful. Even in a Sardis type church, God always has His remnant. He has His few who belong to Him, even here. That must have been a tough challenge for those folks.

Beloved, the reference to white garments is always speaking of salvation through spiritual regeneration from death to life. I put on Jesus. He is my

white garment. I have no purity of my own to offer.

At salvation, Jesus took my filthy garments away and left them at the cross, where He paid my debt of sin. But He doesn't leave me unclothed. The filthy garments are gone and He gives me His righteousness to wear.

What happens to Christians who play in the world's mud? The language here is graphic. Like our little girl with white gloves. We've gotta keep her out of mud puddles. We put on Jesus pure white garments. We are to be distinct from the world and its mud. Separate from how this world lives. And thinks.

4 '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.

5 '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.

The clothing with white garments is spiritual regeneration. True salvation. The Holy Spirit quickens me to life. He dwells in me. I am clothed with Christ. This is true spiritual life. I in Him and He in me.

Remember that these 7 churches each also define prophetic eras in church history. Sardis represents the era roughly 1520 - 1720 ish in the history of the church. The papal church, fully ripened. Fully dead. False religion only producing more false religion.

But within that system, a few remembered the true "once for all delivered to the saints, faith" Jude 3 A few repented and clothed themselves with Jesus. The reformation began in this time period.

There's a reason the plaque says "Saint Marks Protestant Episcopal Church". That name was sort of lost to us. By the time we began here, the sign out front just said Saint Marks Episcopal.

But the cornerstone and the historic documents say; Saint Mark's P. E. Church. I had to look it up. I didn't know what P. E. stood for. Protestant Episcopal. Protestant. Protesting what?

Romanism. They wanted it stated in their name. We are a P. E. Church. It goes back to vs. 5; *He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments - and I will NOT erase his name from the book of life.*

What did the papal church do, what do they still do, to people who remember and repent and clothe themselves with Jesus?

Well, if they don't kill you, they certainly excommunicate and anathematize you. Cross your name out. Abandon you to hell.

Jesus says, I won't erase your name. They will. I won't. They'll confess your name before men as condemned. I'll confess your name before my Father and before His angels.

Exultant approval! Jim is Mine! He belongs to ME! They pronounce him accursed. I pronounce him Alive. In ME. He belongs to me. The FATHER is pleased, and the angels rejoice.

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

The false church says - Don't listen to that guy. Fanatic Bible pounder.

The Spirit says; You better Hear what these letters to the 7 churches "say". Sadly, many are deaf. Their spiritual ears are blocked. They WILL NOT hear.

Jesus final word in all of the letters is; Listen. Hear. Receive. Let's pray