

The Lord's Word to His Church: Sardis

We are looking at Revelation, particularly chapter 2 and 3, because in this book, the apostle John received a series of visions. And the vision that begins the book of Revelation is a vision of Christ in His church. The first and few chapters are really about the present: Christ and His church, Christ in His church, Christ speaking to His church.

In Asia Minor, there were seven churches that had been established in seven cities. Basically, when Paul founded the church in Ephesus, that church became a strong church and took the gospel, according to [Acts 19:10](#), throughout all the rest of Asia Minor – which is Modern Turkey – and churches were established in many cities. Seven of them are mentioned here. But some 30 years had passed since the founding of those churches. And those churches had settled into certain kinds of personalities, if you will, certain kind of character.

After 25 or 30 or maybe a little more years, they began to differ from each other in some ways. And at this particular time at the very end of the first century, the Lord reveals letters to these seven churches. He gives them by revelation to John, John writes them down as a portion of the book of Revelation with all the rest of his visions, and then they are taken by the representatives of those churches who came to visit John on the Isle of Patmos and are distributed back to their churches. Each of these churches mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 is a real church and a real place, and we made that clear. Each of these churches had particular characteristics and particular needs. Five of them were in some serious trouble. Two of them are only commended: the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia. The other five are condemned in some way.

It was not easy to live the gospel, preach the gospel, uphold the gospel in that period of time at the end of the first century: Christ had been rejected, the apostles had been killed. John, the final apostle, who really was the patriarch of these churches in Asia Minor, was in exile on Patmos: a very old man, breaking rocks with the rest of the prisoners until his death. The church was under persecution, and the persecution was fierce. And so what you have here are seven churches living in a hostile world under persecution and the character that develops in that situation.

The Lord recognises the character of each church, the issues in each church, and sends a letter to each one; and they're contained in these two chapters: chapter 2 and 3. These are unique churches, and yet they're kinds of churches that exist in all periods of time, including now. So in a sense, these letters are timeless, and they have literally spoken to every generation since then to this present one, and they will continue to be read and preached and understood by every generation until the end of the age.

We come to the church in Sardis, chapter 3, the church in Sardis in chapter 3. The message to this church is really sad; let me read it to you: "To the angel – " or the messenger, the messenger who'll take this letter back to 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. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed – " or fulfilled " – in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 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. He who overcomes will 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

I think you all know what a light year is. A light year is the distance light goes in a year, moving at 186,000 miles a second; that's a light year. I was reading about one particular star that astronomers estimate is 33 years away from earth. It would take 33 years for that light to reach earth. This particular article went on to say that that star could have been plunged into darkness 25 years ago. It could have died. But light would still be pouring down to earth. It would be shining in the sky as brightly as if the star was still alive.

The church at Sardis is something like that. It was dead, but it was still shining by the light of a brilliant past. It was a dead church. That is the worst thing that could ever be said about a church: it's dead.

The church, by definition, is to be alive. It is a place where God lives, where Christ lives, where the Holy Spirit lives, where believers are alive. They've been given life. A church is to be the fellowship of those who possess eternal life.

Not this church. This church is dead, and the emphasis there is speaking about spiritual death. Like [Matthew 21:19](#), our Lord's sort of depiction of Israel – leaves, but no fruit. This is the church, the first church of the tares you might say: "You are dead." You could say that the congregation in Sardis was the very reverse of the congregation in Smyrna. Smyrna was being put to death and yet lived. Sardis appeared to be alive; it was dead. A dead church, living a fake life.

Now, remember, this is an actual place and an actual congregation: a dead church. What wasn't dead, according to verse 2, was about to die. So what does our Lord say to a dead church, a church literally that has succumbed to the pressure of the world; that has let the world in, adopted the world, tolerated sin, committed all the sins of the churches we've studied before: left its first love like Ephesus, courted the world like Pergamum, tolerated sin and even advocated it like Thyatira. And now, sin has taken over and it's full of deadness. There's no real life there to speak of.

Now, the Lord introduces Himself to this church in a very interesting way. All of the introductions of the writer, who is the Lord, are borrowed from chapter 1, the vision in chapter 1. Here, in addition to the vision in chapter 1, our Lord identifies Himself with chapter 1, verse 4. He calls Himself "the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." What do you mean "the seven Spirits of God"? That appears several times in the book of Revelation: chapter 4, verse 5; chapter 5, verse 6. God is identified in 4 and 5 in heavenly scene as possessing the seven Spirits of God.

What are we talking about since there's only one Holy Spirit? The best way to understand that is to look with me for just a moment at Isaiah, chapter 11; Isaiah, chapter 11. In Isaiah, chapter 11, if you just go down to verse 2, you begin to see an identification of the Holy Spirit that has multiple aspects: "The Spirit of the Lord – " verse 2 " – will rest on Him – " will rest on the Messiah, " – the branch that comes Jesse. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him." And then it goes on to say, "The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

The Spirit of the Lord is one, and then there are six more identifying characteristics. He is the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord, or the spirit of worship. This is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. So when the Bible talks about the seven spirits, it's talking about the seven-fold spirit. It would have been helpful if translators had stated it that way. So the one writing to the church is the one who literally possesses the Holy Spirit. It was the Son who sent the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

So here, the Son of God who has the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and who also holds in His hand the seven stars. That's taken out of chapter 1, you remember, where it depicts Christ holding the seven stars in His hand; and the seven stars are the seven ministers of the churches. So the author here identifies Himself, the Lord, as the one who possesses the fullness of the Spirit, and who possess as well the ministers, the pastors, the leaders of the church. The author is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to the church and sovereignly leads through pastors who are pastors who are faithful.

Now, why does He identify Himself in this way? Because it seems as if that's exactly what's missing. Here is a church without the Holy Spirit, generally speaking. Here is a church, obviously, with pastors who are not faithful, who do not belong to the Lord.

Here, the Lord identifies Himself in an interesting way – not in judgment, not as one who's omniscient and sees everything with laser eyes and comes with burnished bronze feet to trample out judgment in His church. There's really no judgment here as such because this is a dead church to start with. It is the description of the one who writes the letter that speaks to the real issue; the one who has the Holy Spirit and who has in His hand true ministers, writes to a church that has neither, that has neither. They have forfeited the Holy Spirit and faithful leadership. They're being led by false leaders void of the Holy Spirit. The life and power of the Holy Spirit is not present. The illuminating of the Holy Spirit is not there. The enabling of the Holy Spirit is not there. There's no godly leadership there. Without the Holy Spirit and without godly leadership, church was dead: a church dominated by the flesh, dominated by sin, dominated by unbelief; mostly, mostly populated by the unregenerate, by the unregenerate; no life at all – although there would be some believers there who were indifferent and some who were faithful.

Now, what about Sardis? What is this place? Well, there are only three messengers left to take a letter: one to Sardis, one to Philadelphia, and one to Laodicea, and it's over. So we've reached the fifth city and the postal route in Asia Minor on this sort of journey.

Sardis is rich and Sardis is sinful. It is the ancient capital of the Lydian kingdom, going all the way back to 1,200 years before Christ; rich in gold, rich in silver. There are some historical indication that it might have been the first place where gold and silver were minted into coins. There was a river there that seemed to be rich in gold from which the gold was mined. Because of its wealth, a city that endured many wars, they were usually victorious because of the geographic location.

They became a center for wool and dying, things that were particularly common in the ancient world. By the middle of the sixth century, the city attained such a – this is B.C. – the city attained such a high level of respect, that when its downfall came at the hands of a little known enemy, the Greek cities received the news of it with disbelief. It was conquered. It was conquered not once, but it was conquered twice. It was conquered in 549 B.C. It was conquered again in 195 B.C. The Persians conquered it, and then Antiochus the Great, the Greek, conquered it.

By the time we come to the New Testament era, there's a temple there to Caesar, to honor Caesar, and there is a temple there to the Empress Livia. There is the normal idolatry there. Seven hundred years before this letter, Sardis was one of the great cities in the world. If you go there today, you'll find nothing but a pile of ruins near a little village called Sart. But once, it was the glory of Lydian Empire, and it's greatest king was a man named Croesus. Have you heard that name? Have you heard "rich as Croesus"? Unlimited luxury and wealth.

Sardis stood 30 miles south-east of Thyatira in the fertile Hermus valley near a range of mountains, and it was elevated about 1,500 feet high; almost impregnable, sticking out from Mount Tamalpais like some kind of granite pier. Seemed to be impregnable. Under Croesus, it reached its greatest heights; and under Croesus, it plunged and collapsed.

It had some famous people. You remember the name Thales, the first Greek philosopher? You remember the name Solon, a wise legislator; or Xerxes, the great general; or Aesop, the fable weaver? This was some great city that had fallen into a degenerating cycle. 17 A.D. an earthquake hit it, massive earthquake, turning it into rubble. And Tiberius Caesar came and rebuilt it, and so that's why they built a temple to Tiberius Caesar in the city of Sardis.

Its history was a history of degeneration. From its glory days under Croesus, it had crumbled into nothing and been rebuilt by the Romans. Politically it had declined, morally it had declined, economically it had declined, and the Christian church also was in a rotting condition. Its vitality and power were gone. It was a kind of corpse, a degenerate church in a degenerating city.

Now what about the church? Verse 1 talks about the church in Sardis. What do we know about it? Basically nothing. We don't know who founded it. We don't have names of people associated with it in Scripture, so we don't know anything. Obviously it was founded, as I mentioned earlier, in that period of time when out of Ephesus, all of Asia Minor was reached with the gospel, as [Acts 19:10](#) says. We do have one name of one pastor, one famous pastor of that church at a later time by the name of Melito, M-E-L-I-T-O, who some think wrote the first commentary on Revelation.

There's no mention of persecution against this church, although there might have been some; there must have been some. There's no mention of bad theology. There's no mention of any false teachers. There's no mention of any compromise with the world. There's no mention of any sin. But the church must have imbibed all of that because it was dead – no spiritual life. It's just amazing that that could happen in less time than I have been pastor at Grace Community Church. The spiritual history of Sardis church paralleled the political history of that city, a steady decline into nothing. The church had a name, church in Sardis, but it had no life.

Now, we come to the opening of this letter; and usually when the letter starts, there's some commendation; but not here. It starts with condemnation. Look again at verse 1: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive. You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." And then the end of verse 2: "I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God." Another way to say would be: satisfactory, fulfilling, acceptable. "I know your deeds; you're dead. Your deeds are not acceptable."

First of all, again, we come to the reality of the omniscience of our Lord. He sees everything, He misses nothing, and there is nothing to be commended in this unsaved church. This church is the world. This church is so defiled it is dead. It is decayed on the inside. It is disintegrated; it is dry rot. It is like any liberal church that denies the Bible, denies Christ, denies the gospel: it's dead. "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." "Dead in trespasses and sins," [Ephesians 2:1](#). That's where that death is defined: dead in trespasses and sins.

Colossians says essentially the same thing, [Colossians 2:13](#), "Dead in transgression and the uncircumcision of your flesh." When it says dead, it means spiritually dead. This is a church full of unconverted people, unconverted people. We're used to that. We're used to that.

There are churches attended by people and led by people who don't believe the Bible, don't believe in Christ, don't believe the gospel: they're dead churches. But 30 years after the founding of the church, in the first century, so close to Christ? That is a warning in itself. Any church is in danger of dying when it gets caught up in the world, tolerates sins, abandons its first love – there's a progression here.

You can tell a dead church. It's concerned with tradition. It's concerned with form. It's concerned with liturgy. It's concerned with welfare. It's concerned with social ills. It's concerned with tolerance of sin. It's preoccupied with systems. It's concerned with material things, not spiritual things. It doesn't proclaim the gospel. It doesn't uphold the Scripture. It doesn't pursue holiness.

What kills a church? Sin kills a church. Error kills the church. Compromise kills the church, and it's sin in the members, sin in the leaders: sins of commission, sins of omission. Little by little, sin kills. It kills the will because it becomes a habit. It kills the feelings because we become hardened. It kills the character because we become warped and twisted. When the killing power of sin is brought into the church by receiving in unbelievers, by receiving in false Christians, by putting unbelievers in positions of leadership, the church will die. Accepting unbelievers in the church and in positions of leadership grips the church by the neck and kills it.

Now, Sardis went through the motions: "I know your deeds, your deeds." They were sufficient to give them a name among men. Maybe they helped with some of the social ills in Sardis; maybe they did some philanthropic things there. Maybe they provided some service to the community. But whatever they did, "Their deeds were not sufficient in the sight of My God." That's what our Lord says. It's not enough. The church is a living lie. Really, there wasn't any reason to persecute the church, that's why there's no persecution, at least at this point.

As we saw this morning, the church, the true church and the world are enemies. The world hates the true church. But the sinful worldly church is never attacked by the world; it has become the world. It is dead, dead. You could argue that churches die for many reasons and I would argue they die for one reason, and that is because they tolerate sin: sin in the teaching error and sin in the living.

When I was in Scotland a few weeks ago, it was interesting to find out that there were 2,200 churches in the Church of Scotland, which basically was launched in the Scottish Reformation in the 1500s by John Knox and others. So there came to be 2,200 churches in the Church of Scotland. That Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian church, was in a bloodbath through two centuries to survive the onslaught of the English. Whether the king was a Catholic or a Protestant in England, the clergy was always the same. For awhile, they were priests, and then they were Protestants.

But the clergy didn't know the Bible, didn't know the gospel, didn't believe anything, full of superstition and ignorance. So when they shifted from being Catholic to Protestant in England, nothing really changed. But no matter what the situation was from the English standpoint as to Catholicism or Protestantism, they always tried to come to Scotland and conquer Scotland and destroy their reformation faith. And so it was just bloodbath, after bloodbath, after bloodbath. There were 18,000 covenanters murdered in one period of time by the English, trying to get them to conform.

We walked over the initials in the streets of St. Andrews where some of the early young men were martyred for the gospel in the beginnings of the reformation. You think about that, you realise that that church stood against that, maintained its independence, preached the reformed faith, and eventually 2,200 churches existed. Now there are 1,400. They're dying faster than you can count. Some of them are theatres; some of them are saloons; some of them are nightclubs; some of them are retrofitted into apartments. Churches dying all over everywhere. There are dead people in the pews; there are dead people in the pulpits.

Church may be socially distinguished, may have all of its programming, but it's a spiritual graveyard, and its works are grave clothes: a poor disguise for an ecclesiastical corpse. Kind of reminds me of Samson: the charming, lovable hero of Israel in the dark days of their history, in the days of the judges, when Samson showed up to be the greatest champion ever: so many feats and exploits of heroic strength and courage. And every child knows all the wonderful stories.

But something happened. Samson fell into sin, lost touch with the source of his strength. His hair only symbolised the spiritual fact that God was his strength; and when he disobeyed God, he lost that strength. When confronted with danger, he tried to react, and the Bible records this: "He didn't know that the Lord had departed from him."

What a sad statement: "He didn't know that the Lord had departed from him." Same old Samson, same living name, but the Lord was not there. The result: Samson's defeat, imprisonment, blindness, death. That miserable wreck, Samson: pitiful, blind giant, tied with two brass chains, stooping over the grinding mill in the prison of Gaza, brought there by sin. This is an illustration of Sardis, a church once alive: strong, virile, powerful; began to court the world and tolerate sin; became weak and blind and dead. And now the church at Sardis is bound in brass chains, grinding the grains of sin's prison because God has long gone.

So many churches like that. This nation and the world is covered with them – dressed up, organised – but the whole congregation is blind and dead. Like the ancient mariner, dead men pull the oars, dead men steer the ship. Listen carefully the next time you pass that kind of church. You may faintly hear the din a lot of weak, sinful, blind dead people grinding; and you remember that Jesus said, "You have a name that you live, but you are dead."

There is, in verse 4, in verse 4, one little hope. There is nothing to say to commend the church, but there is some hope: "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." That describes believers. There were believers in that church, true believers.

While I was away, I was given a manuscript of a new book that's coming out over there called *A Sad Departure*. It's a story of people leaving the church of Scotland. They're leaving: pastors are leaving, people are leaving, people who've been in the Church of Scotland for years are leaving, pastors who've preached in their churches for decades are leaving. It's a sad departure. I was asked to read the book and review the book, and I found it very interesting as they explained why they were leaving. And what seemed to trigger it was when the Church of Scotland decided that homosexuality and same-sex marriage is absolutely fine for anybody, for everybody, including pastors, and they said, "We have to leave," and so there's an exodus. And there's a call for others to leave.

And when I wrote a little review of the book, I couldn't help but say this: they didn't leave when the Church of Scotland denied the authority of Scripture, in their documents. They didn't leave when they denied the deity of Christ. Now they leave over same-sex marriage? Is that the high ground? How can they protect themselves from being criticised that the big issue for them was not the Bible, and the big issue for them was not Christ, the big issue for them is homosexuality? I'm glad they're leaving, but I'm a little concerned that they're going to be accused of leaving solely on that basis, which makes that a bigger issue than biblical authority and the nature of Christ. But in that church, as in all churches that are going through that same movement to death, there are always going to be some believers. They're always going to be there, sitting in there, having to grapple with that reality.

As I said, the book is about those who are finally going to leave. And here in Sardis, there were a few. The church as a whole is dead. "There are a few who have not soiled their garments. They will walk with Me in white, for they're worthy," a few, *oligos*, slight, small.

And we know God always will have His few. Look, there was no other church in Sardis. That was it, and you went there because that's all there was. There was a remnant, like in Ezekiel 14. There's a remnant, like in Romans 11. There are a few unspotted from the world. There were a few believers among the unbelievers, genuine among the hypocrites, humble among the proud, spiritual among the carnal, separated among the worldly: true Christians, leading pure, wholesome, Christ-like lives in the midst of corruption. They have not defiled their garments.

The word "defile" is used with reference to dying, colouring something. They haven't stained their garments. They haven't polluted their garments. It could even be translated "smeared their garments."

Garments have reference to character, to character. And even in pagan worship, there's some interesting things that you can find out in looking at history. Pagans were to come and worship only when they had cleaned their clothes. They were not to come with dirty clothes, even pagans. That was a symbol of their goodness, of their virtue. They wanted to present themselves before their false deities as worthy of the deity's affection and good will. Garments have reference to character. There were some who had not defiled their garments.

Well, [Isaiah 64:6](#) says, "All our righteousness is filthy rags." So the people who came with undefiled garments, metaphorically speaking, were those who had been cleansed by Christ. Literally, they'd been covered with the righteousness of Christ. This is speaking about believers.

Believers are so identified later in the book of Revelation, in particular in the 19th chapter, verse 7: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready, and it was given to her to clothe herself in the fine linen, bright and clean." Fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation, chapter 7, even in verse 14: "He said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" We're talking here about believers who've made their garments white in the blood of the Lamb, who are covered by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to them as if fine linen was their garment. These undefiled have not fallen into the pagan impurities. They had not fallen into the sinful practices, they had not bought into the lies and the deception, and they were there in that church, as surely they are in many, many dead churches. And now He speaks to the people who are there, in both groups.

Here's the command; let's look back at verses 2 and 3: "Wake up." There are five key commands: "Wake up. Wake up." What does that mean? Assess your condition; look around you. Wake up. Be alert; watch. Why? Go to verse 3, it explains it: "If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come to you." Whenever the Lord talk about coming like a thief, it's in judgment. It is in judgment. This is pretty consistent through the New Testament; it's really consistent in fact.

In 1 Thessalonians – you're probably familiar with some of these passages – chapter 5: "You, yourself know – " verse 2 " – full well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. And while they are saying, "Peace and safety!" destruction will come on them." Coming as a thief in the night is coming at an unknown moment for the purpose of doing harm, of destruction. Thieves comes to do harm.

"Destruction will come upon them suddenly like labour pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief." Christ is coming, not as a thief to the believer. We welcome His coming. We open the doors for Him to come. We say with John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." He's coming to us as a welcome Lord, and we want Him to come – the sooner, the better.

But to unbelievers, this is a dire reality, a dire reality. He is coming in judgment. He is coming like a thief comes, to kill and destroy and steal. That's the picture in the New Testament. So the first command then is to the non-believers in the congregation: "Wake up before judgment comes. Wake up. Wake up before judgment comes."

The second word is "strengthen." "Strengthen the things that remain which were about to die." This would be to the believers. This would be to the believers. "Rescue what remains. Rescue what is left. There's still some hope." You would say that to a person in a church like that, "If there's anything that hasn't died, if there's any truth, if there's any virtue, if there's any purity anywhere, rescue that. Do what you can to rescue that." That's the reformation. That's the revival.

And then in verse 3: "Remember. Remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent." I think, again, this is directed at believers: "Remember the truth that you received and heard, hold onto it, and repent of any sin." To the unbeliever: "Wake up."

To the remaining believers: "Strengthen what is still alive, even if it's barely alive. Remember what you received and heard from the apostles, of course, from the Lord. Hold it and repent, wherever repentance is near, wherever it's available. Wherever it's possible: repent, turn. And if you don't do these things, I will come to destroy you." Some of these churches have been destroyed, but they still go through motions.

To the dead: "Watch, repent." To the sleeping: "Remember, repent." To the faithful: "Strengthen, hold on to the truth." This is amazingly, amazingly precise careful counsel to people who are believers in a dead church, and the dead people as well.

A final word of counsel in verse 5 actually, then we'll look at verse 6, "He who overcomes." Here comes a promise: "He who overcomes." What do you mean, "He who overcomes"? John uses that throughout these letters; and to understand it, you have to go back to his epistle, [1 John 5:5](#). "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." So when he picks up the term "overcomer," He's referring to someone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

So to those who are believers, those of you who are already believers, and those of you who wake up and repent: "To those of you who overcome the world, you will thus be clothed in white garments, you will thus be clothed in white garments." And what He means by that is the garments of righteousness that we mentioned earlier, and ultimately, Revelation, chapter 19, "the garments of glory."

In the ancient world, white stood for festivity, as it does even now for a wedding. In the ancient world, white stood for victory, white stood for purity. For all of these reasons, the garments of the believer in glory will be white fine linen, as I read you in Revelation 19. White is the brilliance of glory. "If you will repent and remember, and strengthen and hold fast, if you will overcome by your faith in Christ, you will be clothed in white garments, the faithful garments of eternity: eternal life."

And then He says this: "And I will not erase his name from the Book of Life." Very interesting comment: "I will not erase his name from the Book of Life." That's a very important promise.

First of all, rulers of cities had census; they had the name of all the citizens. They kept records of the citizens even as people do today. Your name could be erased, and it would be erased two ways basically. One: if you died, your name would be erased. Two: if you committed some crime against the state, you would lose your citizenship. Your name would be erased. But God will never erase the name of His own out of the Book of Life. Be an overcomer; put your trust in Christ. Believe in Christ Jesus as the Son of God and you will be eternally clothed in white garments; and even when you die, your name will never be erased from the Book of Life.

Wish I had time to trace through the Bible the term the "Book of Life." It's in Philippians 4. It appears again several times in the book of Revelation. It is God's book in which He keeps the record of those who have eternal life.

Back in [Exodus 32:33](#) – just a footnote – God speaks about someone being removed from the Book of Life, but that's a completely different context. That is a kind of an expression meaning an untimely death, an untimely death. That's a different setting all together. God is saying in Exodus 33 you could die. But when it comes to that heavenly Book of Life, no one whose name is written there will ever be removed. No matter what crime we may commit, it's forgiven; and even when we die, we enter into eternal glory. "Under no circumstances would I erase your name. Petty kings might do that; I would never do it."

In the Post-Reformation period 1517, say, to 1750, the church exercised terrible acts of excommunication – the Roman church – separating souls, they said, from the church and consigning them to hell. For example, the pope's henchman stood in the presence of the fearless preacher Savonarola in Italy and they said, "I separate you from the church militant and triumphant," words of the pope. "I separate you from the church militant and triumphant," to which Savonarola, the preacher, replied, "From the church militant that is alive on earth, yes. From the church triumphant in heaven, no, never. No, never."

Martin Luther was excommunicated. His name was blotted out of the church books, and his soul was consigned to everlasting hell and damnation. That is what the Catholic church did. God would never do that to an overcomer: never.

[Revelation 20:12](#), "I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life, and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." The dead, unconverted, are judged by books that keep a record of their sin. But our names are in the Book of Life.

One final hopeful comment at the end of verse 5: "And I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. If you will repent – wake up, repent – remember, put your trust in Christ, I will clothe you in the white linens of eternal life, I will never erase your name from the Book of Life, and I personally will confess your name before My Father and before His angels. In [Matthew 10:32](#), Jesus said this:

"Whoever confesses Me before men, I'll confess before My Father who is in heaven." Genuine faith in Christ means that we receive all these promises: eternal life, never to be removed, and to be confessed as Christ's own before His Father, before the holy angels.

And then a final word in verse 6: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "Are you listening?" That's how each of these ends – as you glance back, you can see it. "Are you listening? If you are dead in trespasses and sins, wake up and repent and come to Christ. If you are saved, but sleeping and indolent and indifferent and worldly, remember and hold fast and strengthen. And if you are vibrant and alive, count your blessings and your eternal promises that await you."

So what happened in Sardis? What was the response? There's a little bit of hope. I mention a little while ago a man named Melito who was a pastor there, and he was a pastor several decades after this letter was delivered, several decades; and he was a faithful man. That historically argues for the fact that there may well have been a revival in Sardis. Some of those who were dead came to life. Some of those who were a little indifferent remembered the truth that they had heard and strengthened what remained, and held fast to Christ.

Our church is alive, and we're grateful, aren't we? Our church is alive with the presence of God – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit – alive with the truth, alive with living saints who have been given eternal life. But there are in our church those that are dead, and the message is to wake up. And there are those that are alive but barely: indifferent, cold, in danger of leaving their first love, compromising with the world, tolerating sin. They need to strengthen, repent and strengthen.

And then there are the great numbers of faithful people who define the church, who define what it is by their life. You know, I'm so grateful that the Lord didn't put me somewhere in the world where all I had was a Sardis church. That would have been an unbearable burden for me; and I hope you have that same gratitude for God's goodness to all of us here.

Father, we're thankful tonight for this church and all that You're doing here, and we've just taken a really quick look at this church in Sardis. Much more could be said about it, and should be. But, Lord, we recognise that these churches exist all over the place, and it's a heartbreaking thing to us, as it is to You. We might even ask, Lord, that You would use us to help people in those churches who are dead, to wake up and repent and embrace Christ. Use us to speak to church people who are not converted.

Maybe as well, we could encourage some of those who are pure, who are over-comers, to escape those places if there's no hope, and come to a place that's alive. We pray that You would lead people away from dead churches, where there are other alternatives, into churches that are alive and vibrant. But, Lord, we also pray that somehow in some way, You might send a great moving of the Holy Spirit to awaken the dead. You've done it before in great reformation and great revivals. We would love to see it again for Your glory and Your honour.

Thank You for a wonderful time together tonight. We had the privilege of spending the full day with You; we are so grateful. Be honoured now as we live our lives under the transforming power of Your truth and Your Spirit, in the name of Christ. Amen.