

# The Dead Church

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*Revelation 3:1-6*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. Things are not always what they seem.
  - 1. The sun may be out, but then it begins to rain.
  - 2. A friend seems so healthy and active, and then he falls dead of a heart attack.
- B. Things in the church at Sardis were not what they seemed.
  - 1. Because there was a disconnect between the appearance of the church and reality, Jesus came and spoke to this church.
  - 2. Let's examine this epistle so that this congregation will not have this disconnect.

## THEIR WEAK WORKS, vv. 1-3

- A. The church in Sardis had a name of being alive, but they were dead, v. 1.
  - 1. Their reputation was that they were alive.
    - a. Those who lived in Sardis and surrounding congregations knew all the activity of this congregation.
    - b. This church must have been involved in a multitude of works, and from the outside everything looked as though this congregation was really doing things.
  - 2. But, the church was dead — they were not doing anything meaningful.
    - a. Illustration about the mother in Antwerp, Belgium who hid her dead son for four years, Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, #2243.
    - b. That's exactly what this church was doing — they fooled people into believing that they were alive.
  - 3. This shows that the Lord knows what the true situation is regardless of whom we've fooled.
    - a. "The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).
    - b. The Lord knows our hearts, he knows what really is taking place — we can't fool him.
- B. This congregation needed to be watchful, v. 2.
  - 1. This congregation would have well understood the command to be watchful.
  - 2. On two occasions Sardis was taken because of carelessness.
    - a. Cyrus of Persia took the city under the rule of King Croesus.
      - 1) The city was fortified except for one area with a sheer cliff.
      - 2) As a Persian soldier observed a guard of the city retrieving his dropped helmet, the Persian figured he too could climb up the cliff, along with others he did, and took the city by surprise.
    - b. Antiochus III also took the city in 214 BC. At an unguarded point in the wall, considered impossible to take, some brave and cunning soldiers put ladders against that spot one night and at dawn entered the city as the main force struck at the city's main gate.
- C. This church needed to strengthen the things that remained and were about to die, v. 2.
  - 1. The form of the verb "strengthen" in the original includes a note of urgency; this congregation couldn't wait to strengthen what was remaining; they needed to do so immediately.
  - 2. They needed to do so immediately, because these parts of their work was about to die; they needed to save these commendable works before they died.
- D. Jesus had not found their works perfect before God, v. 2.

1. "Perfect" means mature.
  2. The works of this congregation were immature before God, but they needed to be matured.
- E. Because Jesus had not found this congregation's works perfect before God, they needed to remember what they had received and heard, and hold fast and repent.
1. "Received" represents the Gospel as a trust.
  2. "Heard" looks back to the time when faith came by hearing.
  3. The Gospel had been entrusted to these Christians, but they had not been faithful stewards. They needed to remember what had been entrusted to them and once again be faithful.
- F. If they did not watch, Jesus would come upon them as a thief and they would not know at what hour he would come upon them.
1. The coming mentioned here is coming upon judgment against this church; it is not Jesus' second coming.
  2. He would come upon them as a thief.
    - a. A thief comes unexpectedly in the middle of the night- "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into" (Mt. 24:43).
    - b. The people in Sardis well understood an unexpected coming, for a great earthquake struck the city in the middle of the night in AD 17.
  3. This shows us that Jesus judges churches. Not only will he judge us as individuals, but he will also judge us as congregations.

## **THEIR WORTHY WALKERS, vv. 4-5**

- A. There were a few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, v. 4.
1. The mention of soiled garments recalls an inscription found in Asia Minor that stated that soiled garments disqualified one from worshiping and dishonored the deity.
  2. Those who worshiped in Asia Minor had to have clean garments to do so.
  3. We must have clean garments to worship Christ.
    - a. When worshiping Christ, we are, of course, speaking of clean lives rather than literal clean garments; we must have clean lives to honor Christ.
      - 1) "Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7: 1).
      - 2) "Since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Pet. 3:11).
    - b. Illustration about the faded flag causing the train in Kinston, North Carolina to plunge into the Elizabeth River, Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, #10221.
    - c. These garments would become white through contact with Christ's blood (Rev. 7:14-17).
- D. Those with clean garments would walk with Christ in white, for they were worthy, v. 4.
1. Walking with Christ would denote close fellowship with him.
    - a. "After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years" (Gen. 5:22).
    - b. Walking with Christ requires the white garments, personal purity.
      - 1) God cannot have fellowship with sin and those who live in it.
      - 2) If we want to walk with Christ and have fellowship with him, we need to live pure lives.
  2. They would walk with Christ robed in white.
    - a. Throughout Revelation, "white" denotes purity and in this context that is exactly what we would expect.
    - b. The priests who served in the temple at Jerusalem wore black clothes and veiled themselves if they had a blemish; but if priests had no blemishes, they wore white and were allowed to serve.
    - c. This white shows that these Christians were allowed to serve Christ.

3. They were worthy. They're pure lives demonstrated that they were worthy to walk with Christ.
- C. Those who overcome shall, v. 5.
1. Be clothed in white garments — again is the idea that they would be pure.
  2. Jesus will not blot his name out of the book of life.
    - a. In the Old Testament, the "book of life" was a register of all living citizens in Israel — when someone died his name was removed from the book (Is. 4:3).
    - b. In the secular world, Greek and Roman cities kept lists of their citizens; people's names were expunged at their death.
    - c. In the New Testament, the "book of life" is a record of the citizens of heaven, a record of those who will receive eternal life.
      - 1) "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10:20).
      - 2) Phil. 4:3.
    - d. The one who overcomes will not have his name removed from the book of life. Is your name in the book of life? Has your name been removed from the book of life?
  3. Jesus will confess his name before his Father and his angels.
    - a. This shows Jesus' approval of those who overcome. He approves of them so much that he will acknowledge them before his Father in heaven.
    - b. Mt. 10:32-33.
    - c. Is Jesus going to confess you before his Father in heaven or does he have reason to be embarrassed by you?