



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

"The Plight of the Living Dead"

3:1-3

Revelation 3:1 "And to the 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."

Revelation 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Astronomers tell us that the light from the polar star takes thirty-three years to reach the earth. That star could have been plunged into darkness thirty-three years ago and its light would still be pouring down to earth. It would be shining in the sky tonight as brightly as if nothing had happened. It could be a dead star, shining solely by the light of its brilliant past.¹

¹ Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, p. 61.

Jesus says something similar about the church at Sardis: **You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.** The church at Sardis was shining brightly, as if nothing had happened. But it was a **dead** church, shining solely by the light of its brilliant past.

It is a cause for sincere and prayerful contemplation. Just what does it mean to have a name that you are alive but be dead?

It will be helpful as we begin for you to know two things about the city of Sardis:

1. First, Sardis, at the time this letter was written, was itself in a state of decline, having fallen from its former glory in history.
2. Second, although the positioning of the city on a hill made it ideal to defend, Sardis had twice before fallen because of overconfidence and failure to watch for its enemies.

Thus the Lord was using the city as an illustration to the church of its true spiritual condition.

Revelation 3:1 "And to the 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."

Each church is instructed in the opening of its letter to contemplate a description of Jesus borrowed from chapter one. The description Jesus gives them of Himself has within it the solution to their dilemma or danger.

Jesus described Himself as **having the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.** As we learned in chapter one, **the seven Spirits of God** is an Old Testament name for God the Holy Spirit. It presents God the Holy Spirit not as seven separate spirits but uses the number **seven** to indicate His perfection.

The **stars** are the messengers, the pastors, of the seven churches. Though talking to Sardis specifically, mentioning all **seven stars** meant that all the churches of the Revelation needed to see their need for the Holy Spirit.

Their **works** were plentiful. I can say that because Jesus said, **I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive**. You don't have a **name** unless you appear successful. They had a name among other churches. They had a name in their city. They were fully staffed with volunteers. There were sufficient material resources.

But their **name** was with men and not with God. Activity was not the same as spirituality.

Alan Redpath was the first person I ever heard say that if the Holy Spirit removed Himself from most churches, 95% of their activities would continue. Sardis was like that. *We don't want to be like that!*

You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. They were the living dead. Theirs was ***the plight of the living dead!***

Their dead and dying works are described in verse two.

Revelation 3:2 **Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.**

We need to start with a proper definition of the word **perfect**. The word Jesus used for **perfect** helps us to understand exactly what they were lacking. **Perfect** means *supplied* or *filled*.² Their **works** were not filled, they were not supplied.

When you think about being filled, and the Lord has just mentioned the Holy Spirit... You'd have to say that their **works** were dead and dying because they were not personally filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can get confused by the various terms used to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit. For example: When you get saved, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It's a one-time, non-repeatable experience.

Then there is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the power to serve God with supernatural boldness. He

² Strong's G4137

comes upon you. You realize it is an experience necessary to your witness, you ask for it, and you receive it.

What we are talking about here is *not* the one-time indwelling, but rather a continuous filling of the Holy Spirit. And it's not the baptism with the Holy Spirit because it is something you maintain on a daily basis.

What is it to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Paul the apostle expounded upon it in Ephesians 5:18 where he said, *Be filled with the Spirit*. It's appropriate to mention Paul and his teaching about the filling of the Spirit because the church at Sardis was founded by disciples of Paul while he was in Ephesus. What he taught the Ephesians was what they were taking to Sardis.

Be filled with the Spirit is in a Greek verb tense that should be translated, *be being filled with the Spirit*. It signifies a continuous and ongoing activity. It is a command to be immediately obeyed. And it is plural, meaning it is for every believer.

We might translate this by saying, "Let the Holy Spirit fill you." But don't be fooled by the word "let." It's not "Let go and let God." The idea is that you are to not let anything hinder the Holy Spirit from filling you.

- *being changed to bring change* -
To explain what he meant Paul compared being filled with the Spirit to being drunk with wine. They represent two ways to quench your thirst. One way is to give in to the appetites of the flesh - of sin and selfishness - and seek to quench your thirst with alcohol.

Alcohol is one of many possible examples. Maybe your "thirst" is not for alcohol but for something else – a thirst for power, or position, or pleasure. Whatever the case, you're seeking to quench your thirst in the world by satisfying your flesh.

The real way to quench your thirst is to seek the spiritual things that truly satisfy. Instead of being under the influence of the world, you are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Thirst for God and you will remain under the influence of the Holy Spirit. You will be being filled with the Spirit.

Jesus said to Sardis that their works **remain** but are **ready to die**. They were doing all the things they ought to be doing – the **works** that should **remain**. They were teaching the Word, worshipping the Lord, baptizing converts, sharing the Lord's table. But they were only doing them as an empty shell with no spiritual life.

The works were empty because the people doing them were not filled with the Holy Spirit. They were teaching, singing, partaking in **works** but thirsting after the things in the world.

Be watchful, Jesus said. It can be translated, *wake up*. Sleepwalking comes to mind. Some people walk in their sleep. They talk; they interact. But it's on some mechanical level that they do not remember. A Christian who serves the Lord but who is not himself being filled is a sleepwalker. He's going through some motions but it is activity without spirituality. It is ultimately hypocrisy.

Strengthen the things which remain. Their Bible studies needed strengthening. Their worship needed strengthening. Their observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper needed strengthening. How? By themselves being filled.

- being changed to bring change -
It is hard to admit to yourself that you are only going through the motions. It can be even harder if what you are doing seems to have an outward measure of success; or if other people give you accolades.

Let's say you come to a point where you understand you have only been going through the motions. What then?

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

They needed to **remember**... **how** they had **received and heard**. It's not so much *what* they were doing but **how** they were going about it. They personally lacked the Holy Spirit's filling.

Hold fast means to *attend to carefully*; it means *to guard*; it means *to take care of*. You guard what is most precious to you. It's not a bummer to protect it. In fact, it's a pleasure. But here they had let down their spiritual guard.

Jesus encouraged them to **repent**. And it **is** an encouragement, not a burden. He knows that nothing else will ever truly satisfy me.

Therefore if you will not watch. This is Jesus shouting, **"Wake up!"** I can relate to this on a physical level. I fall asleep on our couch at all hours of the day or night. Pam tells me to wake up and I say, "I'm awake," when I in fact have been snoring. I thank her for waking me otherwise I'd end up sleeping on the couch until I woke up and wondered where I was.

You can count on the Lord to give you nudges and shoves when you have fallen asleep spiritually. Our problem is we stiffen up and say to Him, *"I'm awake!"*, when in fact we are sleeping.

Better heed His nudges or you will be surprised. **I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.** If you knew when the thief was coming to rob you, you'd be ready for him.

Remember the history of Sardis. Thinking they were strong because of their position, they failed to watch, trusted in their strength, and were twice conquered by enemies.

If it all sounds a little negative, it's not – it's just straight talk from the Lord. He loves us too much to see us waste our lives thirsting after the things that can not only never satisfy but can actually harm us.

He loves His church too much to see it become an empty shell that holds out no hope or help for the hurting.

Be being filled with the Holy Spirit. Let His influence permeate every aspect of your life.

