



**Text**

The Revelation of Jesus Christ 3:1-6

**Topic**

Jesus notifies the believers in  
Sardis that they are dead

**Title**

***“Nothing But The Dead & Dying  
Back In My Little Church”***

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**Thanks to procedural cop shows, we have become armchair coroners.**

When a body is found by our favorite CSI team we anxiously await the liver temp. We watch as they look for lividity, for ligature marks, petechial hemorrhaging, subdural hematomas, and signs of blunt force trauma. Are there signs of a struggle? Then let's get that DNA under the fingernails off to the lab.

**In His letter to the church at Sardis, Jesus performs a spiritual autopsy.**

He notifies them, **“You are dead”** (v1). He then reveals their cause of death, telling them He did not find their “ways perfect before God” (v2).

As autopsies go, it's unique in that they were “dead,” **and** simultaneously they were “ready to die” and could still “hold fast and repent” (v3).

We can't help but think they were dying and would eventually die unless they repented. But the text is clear: They were really dead **and** they were ready to die.

**We're going to learn that, in the Bible, a really “dead” dead man is strangely alive.**

**Rev 3:1 “And to the angel [i.e., the human “messenger” – the pastor] 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.”**

The Holy Spirit is not “seven spirits.” Seven communicates *fullness* and *completion*.

In chapter one, Jesus explained, “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (v20). Jesus’ words remind us of two gifts that He has bestowed to us:

1. He has bestowed to each of us *personally* the gift of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling.
  2. He has bestowed to the Church *corporately* gifted men to keep us continuing in the Spirit rather than the flesh.
- The fact that they had a good reputation means that they had started well seeking the guidance of the Spirit.
  - The fact that they were not living up to their reputation indicates that they had drifted away from the Spirit and were working in their own energy.

The believers in Sardis, except for a small remnant, were no longer depending on the life-giving Holy Spirit. Having begun in the Spirit, they were attempting to be perfected by their own effort and energy, inviting the *means* and *methods* of the world.

Every church faces the constant pull to import the world’s *means* and *methods*. If you want to see what working in our own energy looks like, visit a church that is in a building project that is beyond the reach of their finances. The things that are done to guilt God’s saints to contribute would be *comical* if they weren’t so *carnal*.

Jesus concluded they were “dead.” However, He addresses them throughout as *believers*.

In the Bible, a dead man can still hear God's voice,<sup>1</sup> repent,<sup>2</sup> walk,<sup>3</sup> sin,<sup>4</sup> and believe.<sup>5</sup>

Do you remember telling folks that they left their lights on after they parked their car? It would run down their battery to the point where they needed a jump and then a recharge. In the Bible "dead" conveys being disconnected from the power source, no longer responsive, no longer producing what it was designed to produce. When Jesus says, "You are dead," He is saying that you are disconnected, unresponsive, unproductive.

He is not saying, "I'm done with you," or, "You have lost or forfeited your salvation." When you trusted Jesus, He gave you eternal life. Regarding eternal life, there are different qualities. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (10:10). "More abundantly" carries the sense of Overflowing... Surplus... Beyond what is necessary.. Excess in the best sense. It is not merely longer life, but richer life. Not just duration, but depth.

Comic fans remember when Superman stepped into that chamber and walked out merely Clark. He wanted love. He wanted ordinary. The world quickly learned what "powerless" costs.

We do it the same way. We crown something or someone else. "Dead" and "about to die" describe a heart running on substitutes.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Like more abundantly. He never shuts the current off. We reach for the switch.

**Rev 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 are not told, so it is no good speculating, which of their "works" was "ready to die." I'd like to think that they received this word from the Lord and the leadership got together to do a spiritual survey of their works.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:25

<sup>2</sup> John 5:25

<sup>3</sup> The Revelation 3:1

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:1-3

<sup>5</sup> James 2:17

By “perfect” Jesus means works inspired by Him, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

I started researching the times that the Holy Spirit ‘spoke’ to the churches in the NT. *It was a lot!*

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is explicitly said to speak in clear, intelligible ways:

1. He spoke to Philip, telling him where to go (Acts 8).
2. He spoke to Peter, instructing him to go with the men sent to him (Acts 10-11).
3. He spoke to the church at Antioch, directing the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13).
4. He spoke to Paul and his companions by forbidding and permitting their travel plans (Acts 16).
5. He testified to Paul about coming suffering (Acts 20).
6. He spoke prophetically through Agabus about Paul’s arrest (Acts 21).
7. He spoke to the whole church at the Jerusalem Council when it was decided that Gentiles need not follow Judaism to be saved.
8. He spoke to the churches through Christ’s messages in Revelation (Rev 2-3).<sup>6</sup>

If you survey saints like A.W. Tozer, Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, J.I. Packer, Andrew Murray, they all mentioned one thing that is necessary to hear the Spirit speaking. It’s sort of a launching-off point if you want to hear God’s voice. It is **expectation**.

D.Martyn Lloyd-jones wrote, “We must not only read the Word of God; we must wait upon it, with the expectation that God will speak.”

What does expectation look like? The following suggestions are not a formula. They’re just to give us a little jumpstart:

- Have confidence God *will* speak and come believing God *is* present and communicative.
- Have a listening posture and slow down to hear before you speak.
- A yielded will means that obedience is already settled before the answer comes.

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 8:29; Acts 10:19–20; Acts 11:12; Acts 13:2; Acts 16:6–7; Acts 20:23; Acts 21:11; Acts 15:28; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; Hebrews 3:7; 9:8; 10:15–17; 1 Timothy 4:1.

- Always be anchored in Scripture expecting God to speak through His Word, not merely through feelings.
- Have patient attentiveness, waiting without pressure or frustration.
- Be sensitive to quiet guidance.

**Do we know what “works” of ours are less than “perfect before God?”**

**Rev 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.**

“How” they received was by hearing the Word of God. It alone is the power of God unto salvation.

Do you ever stop to marvel at what is “received?” The moment you are saved, you receive the following:

- The permanent in-dwelling of God the Holy Spirit.
- Forgiveness of sins.
- Justification before God.
- The imputed righteousness of Christ.
- Reconciliation with God.
- Redemption from sin’s penalty.
- Adoption as a child of God.
- New birth (regeneration).
- Sealing by the Holy Spirit.
- Union with Christ.
- Eternal life.
- Peace with God.
- Access to God’s grace.
- Freedom from condemnation.
- Citizenship in Heaven.

We just quote from John 10:10. It’s also the verse which talks a out the thief in the night. Jesus is not the thief in the night. That would be vulgar. Jesus explicitly contrasts Himself with thieves: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>John 10:10

When Jesus tells Sardis that He will come “like a thief,” He is not talking about the Resurrection & Rapture of the Church. *He is issuing a disciplinary warning to the Church on Earth prior to the Resurrection and Rapture.*

The “life” in question isn’t your eternal life. It is your *more abundant* eternal life.

**Rev 3:4 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.**

When I played Little League, I proudly wore the uniform of the Mustangs. I had to try out and earn a place on the roster in order to receive my uniform.

Accepting Christ holds no tryouts. You can’t earn it. It’s all of grace. He makes us “worthy” thru believing.

The white garment is an illustration of our salvation... *But it is more than illustrative.* The white garment is *real* as well. It is something we *will* be wearing. It is our wardrobe for eternity

Those who are dead, who have ruined their reputation and that of the Church are those who have “defiled” their garments.

**Rev 3:5 He who overcomes 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.**

Jesus gave the disciples a master class in defiled robes. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. At one point, He told them, “He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean... (John 13:10).

They were clean all over, *meaning they were saved.* Their mission, the Great Commission, however, was on Earth, in their bodies of flesh.

Out in the world, Christians become defiled:

- You are *passively* defiled by being bombarded with filth.
- You are *actively* defiled when you disobey the Lord.

In the Upper Room, the disciples needed their feet washed. Jesus did the washing. He *does* the washing. It’s the washing of water by the Word of God.

It is put more intimately in Ephesians, where we read, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."<sup>8</sup>

We will return to Earth *with* Jesus in His Second Coming. "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her, it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses."<sup>9</sup>

In Heaven are real books, real ledgers, not a metaphor. Thus we must conclude that "blot out" is something that *can* happen to a name.

These books are tied to the final judgment of Christ-rejectors.

In the Revelation 20:12 the apostle John wrote, "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."

Listen: This judgment is for unbelievers, for those who ultimately and finally reject the Lord. Believers are judged in order to give us rewards. It happens in a different time & place. It can only happen *after* the resurrection and rapture of the church, but *before* we return with Jesus in His Second Coming. Hence, a pre-tribulation rapture.

- Are you an unbeliever? Then you need to be terrified.
- Are you a believer? Jesus speaks this as a word of *assurance*, not *anxiety*. He promises the overcomer will not, cannot, have his or her name blotted out.

**Rev 3:6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' "**

In light of what we've learned in this letter to Sardis, can we say that the Lord has been speaking to us both individually and corporately?

**What did He say to you? To us?**

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<sup>8</sup> 5:25-27

<sup>9</sup> The Revelation 19:7, 8 & 14

Are you... Am I... Are we "dead and ready to die?" Some of us must be. *Repent!*

I believe for the most part you have the characteristics of the remnant. Jesus is daily washing you as you walk with Him. Don't drift back into the world.

Corporately, as I look around, our church is filled with life - the life of the Spirit, given by Jesus. It's not just that we have added a lot of new activities. It's that people's lives are being radically transformed.

Is something wonderful happening?

There is a saying from the 16<sup>th</sup> century that caught-on among Calvary Chapel pastors. Think about it, and about what it means for you, and for us.

**"Why not here? Why not now?"**