

As I continue to read my Bible and intermingle with the religion of our day, I am increasingly convinced that there are few true Christians—the Christianity of our day is marked by a worldliness that differs but slightly from our pagan neighbors—supposed Christians who have been reared in churches are characterized by ignorance and indifference—the church has done her best to accommodate such persons, by reinterpreting the church—portraying it as a place of entertainment, or else has simplified it to a mere hour a week—a short shallow sermon, a poem, a joke, some special music, and some repetitious choruses...

To put it frank—the average professing Christian within this county looks, thinks, and acts little differently than the world—there is a liberal spirit that is killing this present generation—a generation that professes to be Christian, but is no longer concerned with the truth of Christianity—a generation that has more concern for saving the planet than their own souls—my friend this county is facing a far greater crisis than its present financial disaster, its facing a spiritual and moral crises that threatens to plunge this nation into darkness for the next several generations...

But then my brethren, there is nothing new under the sun, for 900 years B.C. Elijah the prophet described the religious scene of his day as follows, 1Ki.19:14—“the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life...”—Elijah lived in a day when true religion was scarce in the land—while religion in general was commonplace, and many no doubt claimed to serve the true God—the nation of Israel was characterized by immorality and idolatry...

Yet for all this the Lord says in 1Ki.19:18—“Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him...”—in the midst of all the millions of supposedly “Christian people”—there was a remnant of the truly pious and believing—so it is in our day—of all the millions of supposed Christians in this nation, there is but a small remnant—“whose knees have not bowed to Baal...”—in many churches the larger share of members are spiritually dead or decaying...

Thus our Savior exhorted His hearers in Matt.7:13-14—“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it...”

Thus having considered vv1-3a this morning we come this evening to vv3b-6—but before we do let me begin with a brief review—if you recall we examined vv1-3a under three main headings—[1] in v1a we saw An Introduction, wherein our Savior introduces Himself to the church at Sardis as—“He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars...”, [2] in v1b we saw An Assessment—“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead...” and [3] in vv2-3a we saw An Exhortation—“be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent...”—this then brings us to vv3b-6 a passage we shall consider together under three headings...

- I. A Warning—v3b
- II. An Encouragement—v4
- III. A Motivation—v5

#### I. A Warning—v3b

1. Having exhorted the church to “watch” in v2, our Savior now warns them what will happen if they refuse —“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...”
2. In what exact way our Savior would “come upon them” we are not told—but it obviously refers to some form of judgment...

3. If you recall He warned the church in Ephesus, 2:5—“repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place...”
4. That is, He would unchurch them by removing either His own gracious presence or else the presence of His Spirit...
5. He threatened the church at Pergamos, 2:16—“repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth...”
6. In both of these cases our Savior’s coming was immediate—He would come to these churches now and in a way of judgment...
7. But the question associated with v3a—is our Savior here refereeing to the same thing, or else is He simply referring to His second coming...
8. For as many point out, the imagery of a thief in the night is repeatedly used of our Savior’s second coming in judgment...
9. For example, 1Thess.5:2—“for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...”
10. The point being—He will come in such a way so to catch the majority people unaware and unprepared, He will catch them off guard...
11. But while our text uses the same imagery, I do not think our Savior is referring to His second coming but to an immediate coming to the church at Sardis...
12. Notice again the text—“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...”
13. The idea is this—unless those within the church at Sardis woke up and repented of their deadness—He would come in judgment...
14. The implication is obvious—if they would wake up and repent He would not come upon them as a thief in judgment...
15. Thus the imagery of Christ returning as a thief is inseparately related to the concept of sleeping and not being alert...
16. 1Thess.5:1-6—“but concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober...”
17. Thus having exhorted the church at Sardis to wake up, remember the gospel, and repent, our Savior provides this warning—“if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief...”
18. That is, I will fall upon while you sleep—I will come upon you in a dead and decaying condition—and I will do so in judgment...
19. Now let me pause and suggest two closely related lessons—[1] opportunity slighted brings severe and deserved judgment...
20. Do you remember that gracious invitation I quoted this morning from Prov.1:23—“turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you...”
21. The passage continues in v24—“because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes...”
22. Notice [2] judicial judgment often goes unknown—by this I refer to the judgment that Christ threatens the church at Sardis with...
23. To come upon them as “a thief in the night”—that is, in such a way so as to go unnoticed—to come and leave without being detected...
24. Oh my friend, is not this a tragic reality—that the Lord Jesus would rob a church in such a manner as to come and leave undetected...
25. That He would take something from a church and yet the church remain ignorant that it’s gone—that He remove from a church or a person His powerful and gracious presence...
26. My dear friends, if we think that we can continue to sin again God and despise the offers of His grace, and not have any consequences we are wrong...

27. And there some of us present this evening who have heard again and again of their need to “wake up” and yet they simply role over and continue to sleep...
28. Prov.6:10—“a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a robber...”
29. Yet someone might ask—what exactly is the nature of this threatened judgment, and while we are not expressly told I suggest to that it typical goes unnoticed...
30. That is—the Lord simply gives such people over to the sleep saying—that it—if you really want to sleep then sleep—I want bother you any more...

## II. An Encouragement—v4

1. Here our Savior clarifies that not every person in Sardis was dead or decaying—“you have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments...”
2. Sam Storms—“In a word, there was in the church at Sardis, as there most likely is in all churches, a faithful, believing, godly remnant that had refused to compromise its convictions, and which the Lord is determined to bless and favor with his manifest presence and goodness...”
3. The phrase—“have not defiled their garments”—refers to a moral purity—if describes those who have remained morally unstained by the world...
4. Jas.1:27—“pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world...”
5. The imagery has its roots in the Old Testament, where clean and unspotted garments, is symbolic for moral purity...
6. Gen.35:2—“and Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments...”
7. Our Savior says of such, v4b—“and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy...”—to walk with Christ refers to fellowship...
8. For example, Gen.3:8—“then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...”
9. The Lord walked with Adam in the cool of the day—this of course has reference to the fellowship Adam enjoyed with God...
10. Thus we read of Enoch in Gen.5:24—“and Enoch walked with God...” and Noah, Gen.6:9—“Noah walked with God...”
11. Thus our Savior says—“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...”
12. At first glance it may seem strange to speak of a Christ as being “worthy”—but the word here refers to a gospel worthiness...
13. A “worthiness” not based upon our own merit, but based solely upon grace—grace utilized and manifested in a life of perseverance...
14. Lk.21:34-36—“but take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man...”
15. Notice [a] a coming day (vv34-35), and [b] a need to watch, v36—“a watch therefore, and pray always that you maybe counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man...”
16. Only those who are watching or awake will be “counted worthy to escape all these things”—that is, the destruction of the world at Christ’ second coming...
17. Thus only those who are worthy—that is, who by grace are walking worthy of the calling with which they were called...
18. Eph.4:1-3—“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...”

19. Now at this point I want to digress for a few moments and examine the various ways in which the Scriptures speak of white garments...
20. I suggest to you that within Scripture we find the imagery of white garments in three related yet distinct ways—[1] to our justification by faith...
21. Here I refer to that perfect spotless garment equally given to every person who is justified before God by faith...
22. No Christian person has a whiter garment than others—every Christian has been given this garment upon believing in Christ...
23. Isa.61:10—“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...”
24. Rev.7:13-14—“then one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, Sir, you know. So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...”
25. This is a description of the overcomers—those who hold fast to Christ until the end—they have come out of the great tribulation of this world...
26. But notice how their robes have been made white—“and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...”
27. Notice [2] to our sanctification by the Spirit—this is what our Savior refers to by keeping our garments undefiled...
28. This is that progressive purification that characterizes every true child of God—it entails both a positive and negative...
29. Positively we are to keep our garments clean, and negatively we are to cleanse ourselves from all unrighteousness...
30. 2Cor.7:1—“therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God...”
31. Rev.16:15—“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame...”
32. These words are obviously very similar to those of our text—our Savior is coming at a time unknown to us —“I am coming as a thief...”
33. He pronounces a blessing upon—“he who watches and keeps his garments...”—that is, keeps his garments clean...
34. Rev.19:7-8—“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." 8 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...”
35. Here the fine linen is expressly referred to—“the righteous acts of the saints...”—that is, their practical righteousness worked in them by the Spirit of God...
36. Notice [3] to our glorification in heaven—this of course is what our Savior means in v4b—“and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy...”
37. Rev.7:9—“after these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands...”
38. To be “clothed in white robes” refers to their moral purity—to the fact that they are without even a hint of sin and shame...

### III. A Motivation—v5

1. Typical of His previous letters our Savior ends the letter with a blessed motivation, which I want to divide into three parts...
2. Notice [1] he shall be clothed in white garments—this again refers to our glorification which has its beginning at our death and completion at our resurrection...
3. Notice [2] his name shall not be blotted out from the Book of Life—“he who overcomes...I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life...”

4. Rev.17:8 speaks of those—“whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world...”
5. The point being—the decision concerning whose name is or isn’t written in the Book of Life, was made before the foundation of the world...
6. Thus the radio preacher I was listening to the other day in the van, who said that our names are written in the book of life, when we “ask Jesus into our hearts” was wrong...
7. Yet someone might object—if these names were written from eternity past, and thus refer to God’s electing decree, then how can Christ say—“he who overcomes...I will not blot out his name...”
8. This seems to imply that if a person does not overcome his name will be blotted out of this book, which would mean a person can be elected to life and yet lost at last...
9. Well brethren, I trust you are aware that the Scriptures everywhere speak in this manner—that only the one who endures to the end will be saved...
10. For the very same Bible that teaches the preservation of God equally teaches the perseverance of the saints...
11. Rev.22:18-19—“for I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book...”
12. To add or take away from “the words of the book of this prophecy” have direct reference to the book of the Revelation...
13. Yet the point is applicable to all of Scripture—a person who adds or subtracts from God’s redemptive purposes will in the end be punished...
14. John describes such punishment as—“taking away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book...”
15. The point being—what they thought they had will never be realized—what was promised them by false teachers will be possessed...
16. Or perhaps we could put it this way—what could have been theirs had they heard and received the gospel will be take from them...
17. But the point of our Savior in Rev.3:5—“I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life...”—is they shall have an everlasting inheritance...
18. Notice [3] his name will be confessed before the Father and His angels—to confess means to own or acknowledge...
19. Thus our Savior means—the one who overcomes or endures to the end, He will own him before the Father and His angels...
20. Matt.10:32—“therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven...”
21. Notice in closing several things about this confession—[a] it is a personal confession—“I will confess his name...”
22. Notice [b] it is a public confession—“I will confess his name before my Father and His angles...”—our Savior will own His people openly and in full few of heaven...
23. Notice [c] it is a redemptive confession—by this I mean that for Christ to own us before His Father entails a redemptive element...
24. Sam Storms—“Envision the scene. You are standing in the blazing presence of the immeasurable and unfathomable God, an all-consuming fire, the God of infinite and unending glory, the God of unsearchable and incomparable righteousness. Small, frail, weak as you are, Jesus takes hold of your hand and leads you before his Father and beneath the penetrating gaze of myriads of angels. Then he proudly and happily and joyfully and confidently declares: ‘Father, He is mine. I am his. He is clothed in white. I’ve paid his debt. I suffered his penalty. He is clean. He is pure. He is in me and I in him. He is righteous...’”