

# Christ's Last Word to His Church SERIES: Sardis & Christ's Call to Every Believer: Stay Awake Revelation 3:1-6

As we open to Revelation 3:1-6 we are opening to the only time that Jesus declares that a local church is dead, non-responsive to His plans, and non-functional for His purposes.

Look back over the text of the letter Christ wrote to them, which we read last time. In those words we find in an event from Sardis' past, a key that unlocks the message Jesus gave to the saints that were alive in Christ, and listening.

Follow along in v. 1-6, and I will emphasize the words that they would have clearly understood. Christ says them twice.

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) "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**. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 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. 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. 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. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

## Overconfident Watchlessness

Many of the seven letters from Christ mention local events that those who lived in that city, and attended that fellowship, would understand. Here in Sardis, it is the "watchfulness" allusion, that would ring in their minds. They all knew that twice their city fell to the invading armies of enemies: because the soldiers who guarded them, had slept on the job.

Sardis was built upon a thousand foot high cliff, overlooking a fertile valley. This mountaintop location provided such an apparently unscalable wall of protection, in the natural rock formations, that it seemed to be impregnable to any attack other than through the heavily fortified entrance gates.

Yet Sardis was captured twice in history, before this letter from Jesus arrived; and all the inhabitants knew why. Both Cyrus the Persian (in 549 BC) and Antiochus the Greek (in 218 BC), were able to take the city almost without a fight: both times because of its slackness.

Each time Sardis fell, enemy troops had watched the guards on the cliff top, saw the hidden paths they used to get down to the valley, and used those same paths to creep up at night and take the city. In each conquest, when the troops scaled the precipice by night, they found that the over-confident inhabitants of Sardis had either set no guard, or they were sleeping in the guardhouse.

Sleeping on the job was a physical sign of overconfidence for any soldier tasked with guard duty.

Sleeping spiritually, by not guarding against the wiles of the Devil, is a sign of overconfidence for any believer. Jesus was warning them:

## **Beware of Overconfidence**

There was a clear parallel that the believers in Sardis would have caught, and that all of us in the following generations of Christ's church, should heed. Thus we have the key that unlocks the meaning of Christ's words to Sardis.

Jesus points directly at their need for watchfulness, and ours. Jesus often used this metaphor of watching, staying awake, and sleeping in His teaching. He used it in several of His parables contrasting the good and bad servants. Here are some of Christ's key lessons in the Gospels:

### **Christ's Lesson 1: Believers are to stay vigilant so that nothing keeps them from living for Christ's coming.** Matthew 24:36-44 (NKJV)

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 **Watch**<sup>1</sup> therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this: that if the master of the house had known what hour the

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<sup>1</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

thief would come, he would have **watched**<sup>2</sup> and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Believers are asked to live every day as if it were our last.

## Christ's Lesson 2: **Salvation is personal<sup>3</sup> and non-transferable; and believers are those always prepared for Christ's coming.** Matthew 25:1-13 (NKJV)

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. 6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. 11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "**Watch**<sup>4</sup> therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

### ***The interpretation of this Parable:***

Parables are not to be dissected, and have every point in them allegorized into some spiritual application. Each parable has a central message and purpose that illustrates the truths Jesus was communicating.

Many parables are very hard to understand, and need careful interpretation. This parable is a wedding scene everyone in Christ's audience would have understood. So the time, the number, the term virgins, and the sleeping details were all understood.

The lesson is that in this very common and well known scene, some had made the preparation for the wedding, and some had not. In this parable the bridesmaids all looked alike, only their preparation differed.

Jesus was simply making the point that **salvation not transferable, it is only personal**. Those who had oil were saved, and those without were not. A

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<sup>2</sup> Greek word # 1127 egregoresen.

<sup>3</sup> Salvation is always personal, and must be examined for genuineness. Christ's other parables also emphasize this, like the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:28-29); the man with no wedding garment (Matthew 22); salvation costs everything in the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46/Isaiah 55:1).

<sup>4</sup> Greek word # 991 blepete (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

time came when it was too late to get saved, and they missed out forever.

### Christ's Lesson 3: ***Believers should go through life: always awaiting their Master's return; and always doing what He left them to do.*** Mark 13:32-36 (NKJV)

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 **Take heed**<sup>5</sup>, **watch**<sup>6</sup> and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 **Watch**<sup>7</sup> therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

### Christ's Lesson 4: ***Believers either watch out for the Devil's temptations, or get devoured by yielding to them.*** Mark 14:34-38 (NKJV)

Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and **watch**<sup>8</sup>." 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." 37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not **watch**<sup>9</sup> one hour? 38 **Watch**<sup>10</sup> and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Now as we turn back to Revelation 3, do you remember how similar we are this morning to that church 2,000 years ago?

## **We Are Exactly in the Same Place as Sardis**

The believers, who met in Sardis, and at each of the other six of the seven churches, were no longer taught and led by the personal Christ's Apostles. The churches no longer had that direct, personal touch with those who had known, seen, loved, touched, and heard Jesus Christ.

All of the seven churches were led and taught by second generation believer-leaders.

<sup>5</sup> Greek word # 69 agrupneite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

<sup>6</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

<sup>7</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

<sup>8</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

<sup>9</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoresei.

<sup>10</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreite (This verb is a verb-present active imperative, second person plural).

There were no primary, apostolic witness pastor-teachers left that still led the churches. The last Apostle-Pastor-Teacher was John, and he was imprisoned on a maximum security prison camp, isolated from the world on an island 54 miles off from the coastal city of Ephesus.

***The only way that all the second-generation churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, and every generation since, heard from God was through His written Word.*** There is the most striking truth from these seven letters. Jesus Christ is showing how He communicated with us who are His children, and it is through His Word, written down.

Today, just like the day this letter arrived at Sardis, we are to hear the words that are read, and respond to them, just like it was Jesus Christ Himself, or one of His Apostles standing there and addressing His Church. So, back to this letter in Revelation 3, think of:

## **Lessons that They And Us Need to Heed**

Note that it was in v. 1a "And to the angel of the **church in Sardis** write". The saints in this local church needed to listen as their angel, their messenger that shared with them God's Word, their teaching-pastor. As he read this letter to them, they were being told by Christ that they had not been obedient to the clear commands God had already given them. They had not responded to the teaching of the Apostles from the NT books and epistles, thus they were not pleasing Christ in their day-to-day behavior.

What had Jesus already asked for them to do, and taught them through their pastor's ministry of the written and taught Word to them?

**They knew that Jesus described true believers as those who are: Overflowing with the Holy Spirit of God.** John 7:37-39 (New King James Version) On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 **He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**" 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**They knew that Paul described true believers as those who are: Living Life in the power of His Spirit.** Gal 5:16 I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Jesus offers us overflowing Spirit filled lives. But to be filled we must first empty what is already there in our lives. This leads to the constant desire of God, for these early believers, and for us today:

## **The Necessity of Spiritual Watchfulness**

One of the more frequent calls to believers in the NT is to live the un-intoxicated life. Not getting heavy-eyed and sleepy in a spiritual sense.

- Romans 13:11-14 (NKJV) And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to **awake<sup>11</sup> out of sleep**; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.
- 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 (NKJV) Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 34 **Awake<sup>12</sup>** to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.
- 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NKJV) Paul closes 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians with these Final Exhortations 13 **Watch<sup>13</sup>**, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done with love.
- Ephesians 5:8-14 (NKJV) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "**Awake<sup>14</sup>**, you who sleep, Arise<sup>15</sup> from the dead, And Christ will give you light."
- Colossians 4:2 (NKJV) Continue earnestly in prayer, being **vigilant<sup>16</sup>** in it with thanksgiving;
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NKJV) 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<sup>17</sup>** and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope

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<sup>11</sup> Greek word # 1453 egeiro (141 x in NT).

<sup>12</sup> Greek word # 1594 eknepho Imperative; (31 x nepho "be sober" in NT).

<sup>13</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreo Imperative.

<sup>14</sup> Greek word # 1453 egeiro Imperative; (141 x in NT).

<sup>15</sup> Greek word # 450 anistemi (Imperative); from ana "again, anew" and histemi "to stand" # 2476.

<sup>16</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreo.

<sup>17</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreo.

of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

- 1 Peter 5:8-11 (NKJV) Be sober<sup>18</sup>, be **vigilant**<sup>19</sup>; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist<sup>20</sup> him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

## RESPOND TO CHRIST'S APPEAL

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

Christ gives the believers of Sardis, five 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular (as in individual responses requested) imperatives as the Lord of the Church. These commands, if we spoke them in plain English the way they were written, would sound like this:

1. **YOU Watch:** This word (Gr. Word # 1127 **gregoreo**) expresses the idea of being wakefulness, sleepless, or watchfulness. No commandment (9x) appears more frequently for believers in the N.T. than this watchfulness for Christ's coming.
2. **YOU Strengthen:** This word (Gr. Word # 4741 **streidzo**) is our old friend from Paul's writings, and describes a buttress, building a strong support, getting grounded.
3. **YOU Remember:** This word (Gr. Word # 3421 **mnemoneueo**) keep on remembering.
4. **YOU Hold fast:** This word (Gr. Word # 5083 **tereo**) guard, or watch.
5. **YOU Repent** This word (Gr. Word # 3340 **metanoeo**) change of mind that leads to a change in behavior towards God.

Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. This attitude is the key to:

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<sup>18</sup> Greek word # 3525 nepho Imperative.

<sup>19</sup> Greek word # 1127 gregoreo Imperative.

<sup>20</sup> Greek word # 436 antihistemi (#473 + 2476) Imperative.

# HOW WE CAN DEFEAT THE DEVIL EVERY DAY

It has been said for a nation that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"; and for a believer that eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.

- ***Watch out for the permeating evil of false doctrine (Acts 20:29-31):*** Believers are repeatedly told by the Lord to be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul's last address to the elders of Ephesus he warns them that grievous wolves will invade the flock from outside and from inside men will arise to speak perverse things. "Therefore", he says, "Watch!" (Acts 20:29-31).
- ***Watch Out For The Prowling Lion Satan (I Pet. 5:8):*** Believers are clearly told by Peter to be on the watch against the wiles of the devil. The Christian is under a continuous spiritual attack that is subtle. We must ever be on the watch.

## REST IN HIS ASSURANCE v. 4-5

Revelation 3:4-6 "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. 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.

Have you thought about these three assurances?

1. First, **salvation means we get clothed: Christ is our garment!** Romans 13:14 (NKJV): "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."
2. Second, **salvation means we are kept in the book: we are forever saved.** Can we lose our salvation? No, God clearly says so! In Sardis the King could blot you out if he did not like you; but not in the Kingdom of God.
3. Third, **salvation means we are confessed:** Jesus calls us by name and introduces us to His Father.

That is what they needed to do in Sardis, and that is what we need to do today.

Hymn # 193 written by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf says it well:

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness My beauty are my glorious dress:  
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in thy great day, For who ought to my charge shall lay?  
Fully absolved through these I am--From sin and fear, from guilt and shame





## APPENDIX:

# To Overflow with His Spirit: Stop Loving the World

Another letter these churches would have received were the three short Epistles, John wrote when he was pastoring the great Ephesian Church. As one who was characterized by his deep love for Christ, John especially warned about misplacing our love.

Especially misdirecting love for God and allowing that love to rest upon what God hates, the sinful system of the god of this world Satan. John calls the Devil's system: "the world".

**Stop Loving the World.** 1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) **Do not love** [present active imperative] the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The world operates by sending us temptations packaged as enticements from our lusts.

God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

- **We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures: this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* Whether for food, pleasure, or fun: our bodies are built to crave and God says don't allow your flesh to control your cravings. That is worldly and I am against that lust in any form in your lives.
- **We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff: this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!
- **We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptations.*
  - This can be selfishness because I'm most important.
  - This can be irritableness because life revolves around me.

- This can be untruthfulness because I need to protect myself.
- This can be laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition.
- Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate. Lust means worldliness which offends God, it separates us from His blessing.

## **WHAT'S THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S MESSAGE?**

1. God hates profession without possession. Beware of pretenders. Are you pretending?
2. God doesn't approve of just maintenance. It's life and growth and fruit or nothing! Are you growing?
3. God wants to see you: Watching out-Washed in white-written in eternity-waiting to have him call your name.

Does He know your name? Are you robed in White? WAKE UP TODAY!!!

A true believer does not practice sin; a counterfeit believer cannot help but practice sin, because he does not have God's new nature within him. But these words were not written so that you and I might check on other people. They were inspired so that we may examine ourselves. Each of us must answer honestly before God:

1. Do I have the divine nature within me or am I merely pretending to be a Christian?
2. Do I cultivate this divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?
3. Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?
4. Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me? When temptation comes, do I "play with it" or do I flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the divine nature within me?