

## The Omniscient Son of God

Revelation 3:1–6

**<sup>1</sup> And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.**

**“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. <sup>4</sup>Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’**

We have an amazing capacity for self-deception. The believers at Sardis were subject to the same self-deception we are. The human heart is deceitful above all things. So God sends his Holy Spirit to reveal our sin, and to convict us of unrighteousness. We are blind and deaf to our spiritual reality unless he opens our blind eyes and unstops our deaf ears. Sardis was in a dreadful condition. Though they belonged to Christ, they had become dull to Christ and the work of the Spirit. As we open the Word this morning, let’s ask the Lord to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, to help us see what he sees, and then be faithful to what he calls us to do.

**PRAY** — Father, please keep us from always hearing, but not understanding; from seeing, but not perceiving. Don’t leave us with dull hearts, or heavy ears, or blind eyes. Grant that we may see and hear, and understand so that we may turn and be healed. Make the book live to me, make the book live. Show me myself, show me my Savior, and make the book live.

As we move to Sardis let’s be reminded of the persecution and tribulation that marked the time of these letters. All of the churches were enduring suffering at the hands of the world. Believers were being martyred on the human front. On the spiritual front they were infiltrated by false teachers who were leading Christians away from Christ and his Gospel, dragging souls to Hell if possible. They were enduring attacks from their enemy, the Devil. I imagine it was utterly exhausting, both spiritually

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and physically. Yet in the midst of it, while many went astray, others remained faithful and steadfast. Antipas was faithful to death. The church in Smyrna was standing firm. Not everyone in Thyatira followed Jezebel, and Christ did not require any other burden from those faithfully obeying his word.

So it's been a mixed bag of the faithful and the unfaithful; the devoted and the disoriented. And it always is. But the Lord doesn't grade on a curve. He expects his church to be pure and separate from the world — that is, after all, what the Greek work for church means: the called-out ones, **ekklesia**. Those who are clearly different from the world.

I love the phrase we sang a few minutes ago: **Arise! We are his radiant bride!** Radiant! Totally different from the spiritually dark world. He called us this, and he is working to accomplish this in us. We are to look to Christ. We are to look like Christ. We are to live in his resurrection power so that we do not betray the death-conquering power of the Savior. He died, was buried, and came to life that we might die to sin and live free from sin, passionately pleasing and serving God forever.

Well, the letter to Sardis begins as each of the letters has. The Lord comes and reveals some key attributes about himself that have bearing on the course the church is to set. Of all the letters, the statements he makes to Sardis are the most difficult to interpret.

**V. 1 — And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.'**

The scholars who consider this passage have a number of thoughts on what the **seven spirits of God** are. We can make a general statement, but in the words of one very bright scholar, they are “among the most enigmatic” in the letters to the churches. That's a professor's fancy way of saying “I have no idea what that means.” Jesus has chosen to encloud the meaning to a large degree at this time. We obviously see the number **seven** featuring prominently. As we have already learned, **seven** speaks to God's perfection and completeness. So whatever is meant by **the seven spirits of God**, it is expressing something about the perfect character and nature of our God, and it is something, even in its mystery, to stir us to worship.

In the new creation, much of what has been hard to see and understand, what was dim, what was inscrutable, will be clear and plain. I'm not saying we will eventually know and understand everything about God that there is to know. The finite will never grasp the infinite. The created will never fully

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comprehend the Creator. But God created us for communion with him, and so he reveals himself to the degree that we need to know him, and have the capacity to know him. Part of the hope we have is looking forward to the day when we will no longer see through a glass darkly, but will see him as he is. Now we look through eyes of faith; then we will no longer need the “cane” of faith but will see and know and experience the fullness of Christ.

Moving on, not everything is shrouded in mystery. The perfect, holy Lord who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars has perfect, complete knowledge of all things — and of course that includes everything about the church in Sardis.

#### v.1b — **I know your works.**

When we speak of the nature of God, we often speak of 3 “omni’s.” What are they?

- **Omnipotent** — all powerful
- **Omnipresent** — he fills creation; he is everywhere present at once
- **Omniscient** — He knows. He has perfect, complete knowledge of everything, everywhere, all the time, outside of time, from before the foundation of the world to all eternity. That’s a good thing, too. Because the bible says he sustains and upholds all things by the word of his power in Hebrews 1:3. If he didn’t know something was, he couldn’t sustain and uphold it... and he is the only person who has the power of being. Without him, nothing would hold together. That includes both Sardis, and us.

He knows what works the Sardis are doing. And he knows they are not complete in the sight of God, as he says at the end of **v. 2**. We do well to remind ourselves that God equips us for, and assigns us works of righteousness. **Ephesians 2:8–10** makes it clear that we are not saved by works, as though rebellious sinners could earn merit with holy God. We are saved by grace through his gift of faith, alone. But the faith that saves is never alone; it creates a new heart which loves to do the works God has prepared for us to do. Sardis, the Lord Jesus has come to inspect the work he has assigned, and while you’ve accomplished somethings, you have not completed what God has prepared.

Now if an outsider were listening to the Lord’s evaluation of the church, they may be a bit surprised. Why? Because Sardis has a reputation for being alive, for looking good in the eyes of men. But the Lord knows, and he does not look on the outside where man sees; he sees and knows the heart. He knows that, like a beautiful cut flower, it may look lovely for the moment, it is only a matter a time until its looks betray its actual condition: dead.

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I know your works, Jesus said. Obviously at some point in the past they were doing what they should have been doing. They were studying God's word to know what work they were to do. They were praying for the lost, and for power to live as they ought. They were advancing God's mission in a hostile world. But somewhere along the way they nodded off. Now, remember how spiritually and physically exhausting their world is, as we have discussed in these last few weeks. They seem to have grown tired, and to some degree, you can understand why.

I understand tired. Friday night, after our encouraging, delightful anniversary banquet, I ran completely out of steam and stumbled out the door while several of you stayed and worked. I was exhausted from a long week. Unexpected challenges arose, alligators ganged up on me Thursday and Friday... I had spent everything I had. When I got home a few minutes before 9, I stumbled to the bed, kicked my shoes off, and collapsed without ever getting out of my clothes or taking my contacts out. I did not intend to fall asleep like that, and I didn't even realize I had fallen asleep until 1 in the morning. I woke up, oblivious to the time, fully dressed with contacts stuck on my corneas like wallpaper. I was disoriented and was trying to figure out where I was, what time it was... but I couldn't see because my eyes were in pain from the contacts. I could not believe I had been asleep 4 hours. I had no idea. Making it more surreal to me, I had slept hard enough to have some realistic dreams in which I was cheerfully working side by side with the folks who stayed late Friday to get set up accomplished. In my dream, we had it ready to go, and everyone was leaving with smiles on their face as departed the building. But none of that actually happened. At least I don't think it did.

I bet Sardis had endured some hard weeks and months. The other churches certainly had. And maybe while celebrating the good job they were doing they ate too much turkey and pumpkin pie, and inadvertently fell asleep, neglecting the cleaning, the set up, the hard work that remained to be done. In their dreams, they were doing a great job. But they were snoozing so soundly that they weren't accomplishing anything more than a corpse. Praise God that they wearied themselves in prayer, and in study, and in mission. But they must not have taken the warning of **Galatians 6:9** to heart — **Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.** They quit working. Maybe not purposely or pridefully; maybe they tired. We are not told. All we know is that they were on break, taking a nap somewhere when the Lord showed up.

Parents of teens in other places that have nothing to do with parents of teens who attend here — because this would never happen here... Parents in other churches might understand the Lord's

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sharp rebuke here. Imagine those poor parents, in some other church, who left home in the morning for a long day's work on a sunny mid-July day, and assigned their teen the singular task of mowing the yard TODAY, because the last several days of rain left it too wet to mow earlier, and another storm system moving in tonight, so it needs to get done before the evening or it will be overgrown. But coming home at the end of the day that parent finds the grass a mile high, and the teen in bed. "Wake up! Get up! What are you doing in bed?" might well be direct tone used to correct the teen. "If that yard isn't mowed in 30 minutes you are grounded from... whatever it is you wanted to do."

"But I've faithfully mowed it all summer!" might be the reply of that teen in another church. "I would think you'd be happy we won yard of the month last month!"

Do you see how God uses parenting to help us have insight into the Kingdom? Jesus finds Sardis in their recliners rather than on their knees. They are in deep slumber rather than vibrant mission. Maybe the other 6 churches had received reports about how Sardis was growing, their small groups are doing well, giving is up in spite of the difficult economy... And maybe Sardis even believed their own press releases. But Sardis, as 2 Timothy 3:5 describes, had a form of godliness without the passion and power of the resurrection compelling them to vibrant love. The Lord, perfect in knowledge, shook them awake as he confronted them with the truth. Sardis, you are asleep, and there is no practical difference between your sleep and death. Wake up, church. Strengthen what still has life in it.

Not everyone is asleep. **V. 4** tells us some are treasuring Christ above comfort. The Lord sees them, too, as they walk with him in faith. He will reward them, just as he promised in **Hebrews 11:6**. He rewards all those who diligently seek him. The reward consists of imputed righteousness — the purity and righteousness of Christ will be what he clothes you with, rather than soiled garments of omitted righteous deeds. Those white garments that demonstrate they are different from the world.

But a strong warning for those who continue to hit the snooze button. God has set a limit on sin for every entity, and that limit is known only to himself. There is a measure of rebellion that he will allow, extending grace and allowing time for repentance until the fullness of sin has been reached. In **Genesis 15:16**, God has fixed a limit on the sin of Amorites. Jesus warns the Pharisees of the limit of their sin in **Matthew 23:32**. Paul describes the measure of sin God has allowed in **1 Thessalonians 2:16**. He will not contend with unrepentant sin forever.

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**Sardis, shake yourself awake!** Fall in love again with Jesus rather than your ease and slumber. Return to faithfulness! Return to prayer! Return to mission, deeds of love and good works. Make your calling and election sure. If you don't, Jesus, who has set the measure of your sin, will suddenly come and deal with you in judgment. Is that final judgment or remedial judgment? I don't know, but it is terrifying to face the Lord in anything that comes under the heading of judgment.

For those who walk with the Lord in the light of his love, he will cause them to overcome. He has won the victory; theirs is to continue to walk with him. And grab on to this great, soul-bracing, hope-building promise: There is a book of records kept in heaven by God. It's called the book of the life. In it is recorded every child of God who has turned from their sin, denied themselves, embracing Christ as Lord in faith. God knows those who are his and has written in the indelible blood of the Lamb the names of those who are his children. John describes it like this in his Gospel, in **John 10:27-30** — **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."**

Those who draw near to God through Christ, he saves to the uttermost. (**Hebrews 7:25**)

The call of Christ this morning to the church, his bride. Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Walk with Christ in love and obedience and be about the Father's work. Work for the night is coming. Rest is on the other side. Allow your heart to be warmed and stirred afresh to love for God above all else so that you will be joyful and passionate in the work he has given. Pray through **Psalm 85:4-6** —  
**Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!**  
**Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?**  
**Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?**

If you have not come to faith in Christ, trusting in his finished work of salvation, the call to you is to turn from sin and self to him. His salvation is full and free, and today is the day of salvation. All that Christ has done for you remains of no value to you as long as you remain outside of Christ. Run to him.

**PRAY**