Overcoming Arrogance — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 3:1–6 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, May 16, 2021 · *We Will Overcome*

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Thanks to the team for leading us in worship. They did a great job. If you have your Bible, you can open it up to the book of Revelation chapter two. Revelation chapter two. We are continuing a series that we've been in for several weeks now on the seven churches in Revelation chapter two and three. I'm sorry, I said Revelation chapter two. I meant Revelation chapter three. I've done that in every service. Is that not amazing? Band is my witness. This is terrible. We're out of Revelation chapter two. We're into Revelation Chapter 3.

We are making progress in this great book of the Bible. We are looking at these seven different churches and the problems that the churches in Asia Minor had in that historical moment are the same types of problems that churches have today, even churches like us. And so we've been looking from the problems that they had and Jesus' solutions to their problems, to say, what might the Lord have to say to us today as Broadview Baptist Church? And if we have some of the problems that they had, how might the Lord solve the issues in our own church family?

I would assume you've heard the saying, looks are deceiving. Has anybody ever learned that lesson the hard way? Or the phrase, don't judge a book by its cover. You ever heard that phrase? Mike, you mind grabbing those lights, house lights? We've all had situations like that. Some people say don't ever meet your heroes because once you really get to know your heroes, they're not exactly who you thought they were. That appearances can be deceiving. And that was the case of the church that we're looking at this morning. It was a church in a little town called Sardis.

They had a reputation for being alive. They had a reputation for being a go-and-blow church. But the truth of the matter was when Jesus looked at this church, he saw not life, not strength, but spiritual death. And he tells them as much, which I imagine was a rude

awakening for them. And we need to ask ourselves the question, well, what about us? We are a church going and blowing; we have a good reputation in our community. Could what's true of them also be true of us? And the only way to know for sure is to allow the Lord Jesus to examine our hearts to look at what's going on in our church family and to speak to the issues that are there.

And so let's read his words to this church and read them as if he was saying them in our own congregation. So he says, Write to the angel— or to the pastor— of the church in Sardis: Thus says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. This is Jesus introducing himself. He says, I know your works. And usually at this point he says some good things about the church. But here he says, I know your works. You have a reputation or you have a name for being alive, but you are dead.

Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works to be complete before my God. Remember then what you have received and heard, keep it and repent. If you are not alert, or if you do not wake up, I will come to you like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come upon you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes, and they will walk with me in white because they're worthy. In the same way, the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels.

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. So the problem of this city, the problem of the church, I'm sorry, is that they had a form of spiritual arrogance that was blinding them to the reality of their spiritual condition. And it's so interesting: at every church we've looked at, some of the characteristics of the city in which the church dwelt also parallel to the spiritual condition that the church was going through, and that was true with the church in Sardis. If you do a little bit of historical study on the site itself, there is no like city of Sardis today.

There's only a little village called Sart. But in its heyday, this was a capital city of Asia Minor. It was a beautiful city, probably about 125,000 people strong, and it was prime real estate, baby. I mean, imagine having a house looking over a big valley. There were huge steep cliffs surrounding the city on all edges except one, and the only entry to the city was on that short, narrow piece of path. And so militarily they were what you might call impenetrable because the only way to attack them was from that one little narrow piece of land and anybody who tried to attack them on that piece of land was a sitting duck.

And they were successful military-wise because of that. The problem is that they were arrogant. They thought because of our status, because of our history, because we have this prime real estate, we're invincible. We don't need to keep watch. They never kept watchmen out on alert. They never had watchmen on the wall. And as a result of that, this city, Sardis,

was invaded and destroyed two different times, once by the Persians in 549 BC, the second time by the Greeks in 195 BC, Antiochus the Great.[1] And so they were asleep at the wheel, and as a result of that arrogance, they were destroyed.

And Jesus is saying to the church at Sardis, the arrogance of your city has infected your church. You think you're alive, you have this great reputation, you're strong, got a big budget, growing attendance, you got all the things working for you, but it has blinded you to the reality of your spiritual condition. You think you're alive, everybody else thinks you're alive, but you're spiritually dead. That had to have been a shock to the church when they heard it. And so Jesus gives them a way out. The first answer, I think, he gives them for how to come out of their situation is the way that he introduces himself.

Every time Jesus introduces himself to a church, in his introduction, I think, he shows them the solutions to the problem that they face. In the church at Smyrna, for example, they were being persecuted and put to death. And Jesus introduces himself as the one who died and rose again. In other words, I have the life that is eternal that will enable you to overcome the persecution and death that you're facing. Well, here in Sardis he introduces himself as the one who possesses the seven spirits of God and the one who has the stars in his right hand.

And you may think to yourself, well, how does that relate to what's going on in the church at Sardis? And the answer is, the thing that this church lacked was the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He's saying you look good on the outside, externally everything's great, but it's just like a Christian who looks good on the outside, but who's spiritually dead on the inside. Looks are deceiving. What they lacked was the fullness of the Spirit of God. What they lacked, evidently, was good godly leadership. And Jesus is saying, I'm the source of the fullness of the Spirit that you need.

If you want to break free from this spiritual malaise and this decay and death that you're experiencing as a church family, the only way you're going to receive what you need is through submission to me and my lordship. I have the sevenfold spirit. Now some people get a little bit weird about the seven spirits. What is the seven spirits? Why is it seven and not one? Is this the Holy Spirit? Some people think that there are seven different Holy Spirits, which is crazy. That's not what he's saying. He uses the number seven symbolically, in my view, because in the Bible the number seven represents fullness or completeness.

So he's saying, the fullness of the Spirit you do not have. You've been sealed by the Spirit. You're saved. Okay, when you become a Christian, you get the Holy Spirit. But we all know people who have the Holy Spirit who are not walking by the Spirit. They're grieving the Holy Spirit in their life. And Jesus is saying that's your problem, and the only way to fix it is from me. Now the description he uses to talk about their problem in verse 2. He says that they have a name for being alive, but they are spiritually dead.

The CSB translates it, you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. In your notes I say that there was a big discrepancy between their outward reputation and their inward or inner reality. And we've all been to churches that, hopefully not this one, but we've all been to church services where everything looked good on the outside. The singing was great, the preaching was engaging and helpful. The kids' wing was awesome. It was safe. You felt good. You left. But then you think to yourself there was just something missing.

Just something absent, something wasn't there. To use Jesus' terminology, the works were not complete. It's a Greek word that means fullness or filled up to the brim. And it's like all the mechanics were there, the external parts were there, but there was just something spiritually awry, something amiss, and that was what was going on in this church. They had a reputation for being alive but they were spiritually dead. And the question I think that's interesting is, how did they get such a good reputation in the community? And there are people who speculate that the problems that existed in places like Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira— the assumption is those problems existed in Sardis as well, but that this church had found a way to insulate themselves from the pressure of the Jewish synagogues and the pagan kind of temple feast activities and the Roman government.

If you remember from our past couple of weeks, in places like Smyrna, if the Christians didn't worship Caesar as God, then they got physically persecuted. We saw in Smyrna that the Jewish synagogue was called a synagogue of Satan, and if they preached Christ crucified, and if they preached that Jesus was the Messiah, then they would be persecuted by the Jews. We saw in places like Pergamum that to be a member of a trade union or a trade guild, you had to worship the pagan deity that was associated with that trade guild.

So it's possible that this church had found a way to kind of get squishy where the Bible was firm and said, well, I know the Bible says there's salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus, but I don't want to offend the Jewish synagogue and so let's just not preach that. Let's preach a more inclusive tolerant message. And I know the Bible says we shouldn't worship idols, and I know that eating meat sacrificed to idols is kind of sort of engaging in idolatry, but surely there's a way to kind of have our cake and eat it too, and let's just kind of walk the middle.

We don't want to offend any of the pagan people. We don't want to economically disadvantage ourselves. And I know Caesar isn't truly God, but let's find a way to kind of say that he's kind of sort of like a governing God and let's have our cake and eat it too. So they had compromised on all of those three arenas. And as a result of that, everybody in the community thought the church was great. They had a wonderful reputation in the community. But before the eyes of the Lord they had a terrible reputation.

And the question that I think rises for us is, what value is a good reputation with the world if in pursuing a good reputation with the world, it costs us a reputation with the Lord. It is

tempting, is it not? And it's even biblical. The Bible says, as far as it depends on you, to the best that you can, live at peace with all people. Romans 13, you submit to the governing authorities. To the Jews I became a Jew. To the Greeks I became a Greek. To the barbarian, I became a barbarian.

So Paul had to accommodate himself to the culture. Oh, that's great. In our church, we want a good reputation in our city, right? We want to bless the city. A good reputation is wonderful. But it is a bridge too far when, in pursuit of a good reputation with the world, you lose your righteousness and your holiness and your reputation before the Lord. And I have to imagine that this church was totally shocked when they heard these words. When Jesus says, You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.

I'm sure some of them thought to themselves, we have been growing 15% year over year. How can Jesus say we're dead? We have a big budget. We have beautiful buildings. We have a positive impact in our community. How can Jesus say that we're dead? But the truth of the matter is, Jesus said they were dead. Because in terms of the kingdom of God, when Jesus looks at you, when he looks at me, when he looks at this church, I really believe that he's far less concerned about what we do than he is why and how we do what we do.

Certainly he cares about what we do in the sense of we shouldn't be engaging in sinful behavior and stuff like that. But when it comes to the good things that we do as a church, when it comes to the good things that you do as a Christian, your moral efforts, Jesus cares less about what than he does why and how. If you go back to the Gospels and you look at Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and the religious establishment, externally what they were doing was perfect. But Jesus said, your righteousness has to exceed the scribes and the Pharisees in terms of why you do what you do and how you do what you do.

When you give, don't give to be seen by people. When you pray, pray in secret. In other words, don't do it for people, don't do it for the appearance, do it because you love your Heavenly Father. He says, if you even look at a woman lustfully, you've committed adultery in your heart. Who cares about the outward external manifestations? I care about the heart. And he's saying the same thing to this church. It doesn't matter what your reputation is, it doesn't matter what you do, it matters why you do what you do.

I care about the inside. I care about whether or not you're doing the good things that you're doing in the power of the Holy Spirit and not to be seen by people, but to be pleasing to your heavenly Father. And you have missed the mark. You've made it more about what they think than about what I think. God looks at the heart, man looks at the outward appearance, and you've been trying to impress man instead of God. In our church, the same is true, right? The external machinery of our church can be working great.

As a church, we want people to— what's our three things? We want to worship in gatherings, connect people in groups, bless people on teams. We are a Great Commission, Great Commandment, Acts 1:8 church. We say we position ourselves upward in worship, inward in discipleship, outward in mission, right? But all of the external machinery can be awesome. The worship services can be on point, the group life can be fulfilling and meaningful. We can be active in mission, going places, making a difference. And Jesus would say, if that external machinery is working, but the power of the Spirit is absent, if the presence of the Holy Spirit is absent, if you're just doing it for show, if you're doing it only in the flesh, in the strength of the flesh, I don't care.

In fact, it's worse than I don't care. You're inviting my judgment. In only a short matter of time, you will be deader than a doornail and you are not ready for what's about to come your way. Who cares if the external machinery of the church is working, if the internal fullness and presence of the Holy Spirit is absent. Remember what Jesus said in John chapter 15, that I'm the vine and you're the branches. Apart from me, you can't do anything. So you can pretend to produce fruit, you can pretend to be self-sufficient and doing it all in your own power, but the truth of the matter is if you want meaningful fruit, meaningful, true, spiritual fruit that glorifies God in heaven, then you can't bear fruit in your own power.

You've got to bear fruit in my power. You've got to abide in me. Paul raises the question to the church in Galatia, Galatians chapter 3, verse 3. They did the same thing. This is a common problem that churches face. They started out by the Spirit. They started out recognizing I can't, but God can, so let's depend on God. But they had shifted to saying, well, we get started with God, but then we kind of finish it out ourselves. It's Jesus alone, but it's also Jesus plus something once you get a certain age in the faith.

You've got to kind of earn your keep and impress God by the things that you do. And he says, are you kidding me? Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you finishing by the flesh? And it's a good question that we need to ask ourselves this morning, especially if you've been a Christian for a long period of time. Are you resting on your laurels? Are you confident in your relationship with God because of the external things that you do, the church attendance and the small groups and the tithing record and the baptism and the walk down the aisle?

Is it only external? Or are you confident because of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart? Because of that communion with God, that relationship with God. That's what this church was missing. And Jesus is saying, you got to get it back. Every church is susceptible. No person is immune. I came across some language this week about the life cycles of a church. I don't know if y'all remember, a couple of months ago I wrote an email about how churches die and I wasn't necessarily trying to say our church was about to die, but just a recognition that organizations go through cycles.

They get started out with a movement. It's kind of an idea. It's nimble, it's strong, it's rapid growth. That growth creates an organization, the organization creates maintenance mode. Maintenance mode without a new dream and a new vision ultimately creates plateau and decline till the organization dies. And I came across some language this week that I think is even more helpful in terms of how you think about a church, especially a church like this one that was externally looking great but had drifted from the mission. And it's under these four M's.

There's movement, number one, monument. Basically, every church starts out as a movement, right? You're nimble, you're quick, it's an idea. Let's reach our city, let's make a difference, let's accomplish the Great Commission. That movement creates monuments. Monuments are things like buildings and budgets and architecture and structure and systems and all that stuff. Management: then if you're not careful, the complexity of that organization can create a mindset where you're no longer dreaming, you're no longer depending on the Lord for what's next, for what's new. You kind of just lean into your strengths and your talents and your abilities and you manage the machine and you keep the machine afloat and alive, and it takes all of your emotional and spiritual energy just to do that.

And that's what puts you in a place of decline and death. It starts when you turn into a museum. You've all been to museums, right? You walk around. You look at the historical artifacts. Oh, look at how great that was. Do you remember when? Oh, how awesome that was. And it smells kind of dusty and it's a little bit boring. But there's churches like that smell a little dusty and it's kind of boring and they all talk about the heyday and what happened in the past and you're just kind of like, what about the future?

And then if there's not an intervention at that point, if there's not a fresh vision, a fresh dependency, a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then they turn into morgues. And we all know what a morgue is. It is one living person moving a bunch of dead bodies around in boxes. And some churches turn into morgues where there's one person alive or five, six people alive, and they're moving people around from spot to spot. And this can happen to our church. That's the warning. Every church starts out as a movement, turns into a museum; if there's no intervention at the stage of a museum, then it turns into a morgue.

So what about us? What about you as an individual? How do you know what's the warning sign? Well, I think this church probably has some warning signs. I put these in your notes. Things that you can do personally or things that we do collectively as a church that put us in a bad position. Number one, they elevated past successes over future vision. We've all been to churches that celebrate the past. I love it. Celebrate the past. Our church should celebrate a lot of great things in our past, but when it's only celebration of the past and no new dream, no new hope for the future, then you're sick.

You're spiritually sick. Living things grow. Sometimes they will take a disposition of elevating traditions over the truth. In our circle, we call it being more Baptist than Bible, right? Because Baptists are bad about this. They become super Baptistic. What's the phrase? Don't cuss, don't chew, don't go with girls who do. And I guess that's more of a moral statement than a traditional statement, but you kind of let your slogans become your standard of truth, and the Bible's the standard of truth. Jesus Christ is the standard of truth, not your tradition.

And when in a church the traditions trump the clear, compelling voice of the Holy Spirit, and they say, yeah, but no, then it's just a matter of time before you die. This was their big problem. They elevated the material over the spiritual. The three Bs. Buildings, budgets, and behinds in the seats, right? That's the material, that's the physical. Every church needs big B's, right? We need big buildings, we need big budgets, we need big behinds in the seats. That's a measurement of health and success. But that's not the most important metric, right?

It measures the physical and the physical needs to be measured. I'm not denying that, but there's a more important health metric, and that's what's spiritual. Is there life? Is the Spirit of God moving? Are there people getting saved? Are there people repenting and rededicating their lives to Christ? Is there an atmosphere of repentance and faith in the congregation, or has it gotten mean and cold and judgmental and pharisaical? Is it all the things that Jesus grieves over? That's the thing that really matters to the Lord. And then they elevate maintenance over mission.

Okay, they lose their evangelistic spirit. Nobody's sharing the gospel anymore. Nobody's going on mission trips. The church isn't doing any kind of mission trips. They have just kind of been content to be a frozen, chosen, inwardly focused, us four and no more kind of congregation. And if that's the case, then we're spiritually sick and about to die. So what about us? Do we have the reputation for being alive, but we are in fact dead? This is something that before you answer that question for this church, and really don't just answer it for the church, answer it for your life individually.

Because you can do all of those things personally as well. But don't answer it in haste, all right? Because that's what this church did. They said, well, of course we're spiritually alive. Look at what we've done. Look at all the things that are going on. And we'd be tempted to look at the outward appearances when God is someone who looks at the heart. So don't answer it by looking out there. Answer it by looking in here. A church can look good out there, but what's going on in here? This is something the Lord really convicted me on this last year, especially in the fall season?

When COVID hit, COVID took away the external health of the church, right? No one was present. Some of the giving took a dive. The services felt dead. I mean, I tried my best, but preaching to the staff is just terrible. It's just hard to do. And they were pretending to be

happy and engaged, you know, for the camera, but it was tough. But when all that was stripped away, it left us with the spiritual vitality of the church. And really, the only way to measure that spiritual vitality, since no one was showing up, was just kind of watch and listen and see what was going on out there in the world.

And a lot of people struggled and a lot of people who were, I thought, very strong in the faith were not. And even in my own life, things that I thought were good were not good. There was a sickness. And so before you answer the question too quickly, look inside your own heart. Because God looks at the heart. And praise God that Jesus did not just pronounce this church dead and say, it's too late, I'm sorry. He says, no, you're dead, but there is hope. You can turn it around, you can come back to life.

He says in verse 2, the way to come out of this malaise that you're in is to wake up. He says to be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die. In other words, it's not dead yet. So go back and bring it back to life like you would a garden or a flower, for I have not found your works complete before my God. So if we're going to come out of this spiritual death, if you're spiritually dead as a person, or to whatever degree that our church is symptomatic of this same problem, if we're going to break out of that malaise, the first thing Jesus says we got to do is you got to wake up.

Got to be alert. It's a Greek word that means to watch or to wake up and watch and keep on watching. He's saying to this church, don't make the same mistake your city made, because the city was so confident in their power and their geography, they thought they could not be invaded. That's what enabled them to be invaded twice and destroyed. Jesus is saying, don't be like those yahoos. You wake up spiritually. Be a discerner. Be someone who's always testing yourself to ensure that you're in the faith. He's not saying doubt your salvation, but I think he would say confirm your calling, confirm your election, be on a weekly basis or monthly basis, evaluate the spiritual health of your life and of the life of your group or the life of your congregation.

Wake up, watch, and keep on watching. Don't ever become a person who says that'll never happen to me. We should never become a church that says that'll never happen to us. We'll never be like that church down the road that had to shut its doors, or we'll never be like so and so, or I would never do that to my wife, or I would never be like that to my children. Scripture warns us from that kind of pride. It says, take heed lest you fall. Romans 12, don't let anybody think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but think with sober judgment.

Then after you wake up, he says, to strengthen what remains. That means that there were a few remaining graces in the church. There were some activities and there were some individuals who had not yet fallen prey to that spiritual arrogance. And so Jesus is saying go back and rally the troops. I think this is Jesus' way of saying, go back to the basics and

rebuild the core. Okay, if those of you who are gym rats, when you get out of the gym for a good period of time, which I'm ashamed to say I've done, When you go back, you don't focus on the small muscles, okay?

You're not a bodybuilder, you're out-of-shape fat man. So what do you got to do? You focus on the core. You go back and do your major lifts, your chest press, your squats, your deadlifts, the basics, right? And once you re-strengthen the core, then you can work on the small stuff and polish it up and stuff like that. When your church is sick, or when you're sick as an individual, spiritually anemic, about to die, go back to the basics. Go back to things like reading your Bible and praying and fasting and solitude and the core graces of the Christian life.

Go back to things like confession of sin, repentance, getting in community with another person, start going back to church, get plugged back into a group, start serving on a ministry team again, start doing the things that you know will keep you spiritually healthy. And this is something we did as a staff. This is something I did personally. Just go back to the basics. You may think you're past it, but you're not. I remember this last year we felt so lazy because every year when we have a staff retreat, we will do this big strategic planning session.

We'll pull out the whiteboard and we'll do a SWOT analysis, look at our strengths and our weaknesses, our opportunities and our threats, and we'll say what's the biggest need in the church right now and what are some strategic plans to address those needs, and okay, what events are we going to do, and what assignments can we create and who's going to complete the assignments and, you know, that's kind of what we do every year. But this year, because there was a sense in which this was becoming true of our church, we said no strategic planning, no whiteboard.

We prayed and we fasted and we fasted and we prayed and we fasted and we prayed. A whole staff retreat committed to fasting and prayer. And then every staff meeting since then has been committed to fasting and prayer and fasting and prayer. And we started doing fasting and prayer in our congregation, going back to those core remaining graces that really matter to the Holy Spirit, that invite his presence into the life of the church, and said we are not above these things. We're not going to go beyond these things. There's a temptation, I think, for churches and for people to say, well, we're not doing well spiritually, so let's look at the church that is doing well spiritually and let's do what they're doing.

What's the biggest, fastest-growing church in America? Okay, they're doing that program. Let's buy that program off of them. Let's implement it in our church, and let's see if God will fix us. And it doesn't matter how many programs you run or how many people you go and listen to, Jesus is saying that will not fix your church. There are no silver bullets. The only way to fix your church is to come back to me, and you've got to come to me on my terms,

which means you've got to humble yourself, you've got to repent, recognize how far you fall, go back and do the things you did at first.

Wake up and strengthen what remains. Then the last things he says in verse 3, three things: you've got to remember then what you've received and heard, keep it and repent. I think it's interesting he puts repentance last. This is really the heart disposition that motivates everything else. This is a change of mind that leads to a change of action. So he's saying, God, I agree with you about the facts. We are dead. Now I'm going to wake up and do the things you're telling me to do. The third thing he says, though, is to remember what you've received and heard, and to keep it.

That's an interesting word in the original language. It's a present tense verb, and it doesn't just mean like call it to mind, like remember an answer on your math test. It means to kind of bring something to the forefront of your awareness and keep it there. And he doesn't say remember what you heard. A lot of English translations translate this Greek word pōs as what, but it's really the word how. So a literal translation says, remember then how you have received and heard, keep that and repent. Now the reason that they translate it what is because they're trying to emphasize the focus.

The focus is not on the manner in which you heard the gospel. So he's not saying go back and remember what church camp was like and remember what the speaker was saying and remember how the lights were down low and the music was moving. That's not the emphasis. He's just saying go back and remember how you became a believer, remember what it was like when you first became a believer. We have the same kind of linguistic device in English where we'll say things like, do you remember back in the day how we used to X, Y, or Z?

Like remember how back in the day we used to ride our bikes around town? Even though kids don't do that anymore. We would always ride our bikes around Roby and get into all kinds of mischief. Some of my best memories are how we used to go and ride our bikes around town. So when he says remember how, he's saying, go back and remember what it was like when you first became a Christian. Do you remember how needy you were? Do you remember how aware of your sin that you were? Do you remember how thankful you were for the grace of God and the mercy of God.

Do you remember how you realized to the depth of your being, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling? That I cannot warrant my salvation? I cannot earn my salvation. I've been trying to earn it and I'm not enough. Do you remember how needy you were, how dependent you were on the Holy Spirit? Do you remember how— go back, remember that, and put it at the forefront of your thinking from here on out. Okay? Keep it. Bring it to the forefront of your thinking and live your life with that kind of mindset.

That God can and you can't, and that he's able when you're not, and that his Spirit is the only thing, the only solution to the problems that you face. Life in the flesh is a futile spiritual life. Go back, remember how, and keep it. And that's what we got to do. Keep on remembering what you received and what you heard. Remember how grateful you were, how in love with Jesus you were, how you treasured the Spirit's power and presence in your life. That you were nothing without him. Paul says to the Colossians in Colossians 2:6,[2] just as you received Christ as Lord, so walk in him.

The way you begin the Christian life is the way you finish the Christian life. Repentance and faith. Repentance and faith. Repentance and faith. There are no silver bullets. There are no magic Bible studies. You've just got to repent, remember, and keep it. If you don't do that, Paul says, I'm sorry, Jesus says, then you will be unprepared for what's about to come your way. In verse 3, he gives the warning. Remember then what you've received and heard. Keep it. If you are not alert, I'm going to come like a thief, and you will have no idea at what hour I will come upon you.

This is obviously a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ in judgment at the end of the world. Some people think that this is a reference to Jesus visiting that particular church, just like he said to Ephesus that I'm going to come and visit you. But I don't think that's the case. I think he's making a more general reference to the final day of judgment. And he's saying if you don't do this, if you don't wake up, if you don't go back and strengthen what remains, if you don't remember and keep it, if you don't repent, then you will be unprepared for that day of judgment.

That day will come upon you like a thief in the night. Nobody plans to get broken into, right? It takes them by surprise. And Jesus is saying, you're going to be taken by surprise if you stay in this state of spiritual complacency. Complacency leaves us unprepared for the day of judgment. And this whole book is really about the certainty of that day that it will come and that it will come unexpectedly, that nobody knows the day or the hour. But even though nobody knows the day or the hour, we do know certain things that precede that day.

There seems to be like a revival that takes place in the people of Israel. There are certain things historically that take place with the Antichrist. But the third mark that precedes the day of the Lord is there is a mass apostasy, there's a mass falling away. In other words, before Jesus comes back, the church will be marked by compromise. It will be marked by churches that say, let's get us a preacher who will tell us what we want to hear and who will tickle our ears and appeal to our flesh and our appetites, who won't make us feel bad about not conforming to our culture, or who won't make us feel bad about conforming to our culture, who won't call us to holiness like old preachers used to do.

The last days will be marked by that kind of spirituality. And so this is Jesus' way of saying, don't be one of those churches. Don't be caught unprepared when I come. Wake up. And

then after warning those people, he gives a promise to the others. He says in verse four, there are a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes. They are not marked by spiritual arrogance. And those people will walk with me in white because they are worthy. Then the second group, in the same way, the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my father and before his angels.

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen. Now, here's what's interesting. Here's actually a play on words in the Greek. Some of you don't care about this, but I think it's fascinating. When he first starts out, he says, you have a reputation for being alive. Remember that word reputation? That's the Greek word onoma.[3] It means name. So he's saying, you've got a name in your city for being good and okay and alive, but you're dead. But then at the end of the letter he says you got a couple of names where it says people, you have a few people.

It's really the Greek word onoma; it's the word names. So you got a couple of names in Sardis. They're not compromising. They're not spiritually arrogant, and they're going to walk with me in white. White garments. Why? Because they're worthy. In the same way, the people who overcome the arrogance that they're in right now, those people are going to get white clothes because they're worthy. Then here's the play on words. For those people I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will acknowledge his name before my Father and the holy angels.

So the takeaway is perfectly clear. Here's what Jesus is saying. This is in your notes. Better to have your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life and acknowledged by the lips of Jesus on that day of judgment than to have your name celebrated by the world. And this is a message the church desperately needs to hear today. It is wonderful to have a good reputation in the community, but it is better— if you have to make a choice— it is better to have your name written in the book of life and acknowledged by the lips of Jesus before his Father and the holy angels on the day of judgment.

I'd rather have those things than men's applause and headlines in the paper, celebration by my culture. And that's a question we all need to ask ourselves. What name matters most? Are you worthy? Are we worthy? Will we be marked by that kind of desire? Or will we be marked by a desire to fit in and be liked? To get squishy where the Bible is firm and firm where the Bible is squishy, and do whatever it takes to be well respected by our contemporaries, but disrespected by the Lord. Jesus says if that's your decision, you need to know when that day of judgment comes, you'll be unprepared and your name will not be written in the Lamb's book of life.

We saw this in Revelation chapter 20, where the day of judgment comes. There's this big white throne judgment, and God looks for people's names in the book. We're judged by our works according to what's written in the books. Then it says in Revelation 20, verse 15,

anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. So the devil and his angels and all those who are not written in the book, they go to a fiery hell. And then this language about walking in white, we see this throughout the rest of the book of Revelation.

I don't have time to tell you all the ins and outs about it, but it's just essentially Jesus' way of saying, if you're worthy, you'll get the white clothes. If you're worthy, you'll walk with me. If you're worthy, you'll receive eternal life, and it will not be taken away from you. So the question rises: well, how do I become worthy? And it's clear, it's plain as day from this whole message to this church, the way that we become worthy is not by doing things. It's not by external works of righteousness.

The only way to become worthy is to humble yourself, confess your sin, and plead for the mercy and grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. We have the old hymns that are written about it. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you what? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? That's the only way we can have certainty, the only way that we can have confidence. It's not in what you do, it's not in what other people think you do.

It's in whether or not you are putting your faith and your trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and whether or not you are living your Christian life from a place of remembering. There is salvation in no other name. That I can't, but he can. I can't save myself, but Jesus saves me on the cross. You confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. That's what brings about salvation. So if you're here this morning and that's not something that you've settled in your life, then you are not ready, and you are not worthy.

Jesus says on that last day, if you deny me before people,[4] then I will deny you before my Father in heaven. He says, on that last day there will be people who say to me, Lord, Lord, did I not cast out demons and do many miracles and do all sorts of things in your name? And he'll say, Depart from me, I never knew you, worker of iniquity. So the message is clear. It's not about what you do. It's about what Jesus has done and whether or not you're resting in him as divine and whether you're living your life not according to your strength and your power but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So as Taylor leads us, let's just bow our heads and close our eyes. I'm going to do kind of an old-fashioned invitation. And all I want you to do is ask—

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "once by the Persians in 549 BC, the second time by the Greeks in 195 BC, Antiochus the Great"; Cyrus's Persians took Sardis in 547/546 BC, after a soldier climbed an unguarded, precipitous section of the citadel, and the Seleucid king Antiochus III (the Great) took it in 214–213 BC

during his siege of the rebel Achaeus. Source: Wikipedia, "Siege of Sardis (547 BC)"; Herodotus, Histories 1.84; World History Encyclopedia, "Polybius' Capture of Achaeus and Fall of Sardis." ↩

2. Transcript note: spoken as "Colossians 2:9"; "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him" is Colossians 2:6. Source: Bible Hub, Colossians 2:6. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "gnomos" (and later "nomos"); the Greek word translated "reputation" in Revelation 3:1 and "people" (literally "names") in 3:4 is onoma, plural onomata. Source: Bible Hub Greek interlinear, Revelation 3:4. ↩
4. Transcript note: spoken as "if you don't deny me before people"; Jesus says, "But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven." Source: Matthew 10:33 (CSB). ↩