

**Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his mercy endures forever. Amen.**

**3** “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

<sup>4</sup> Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Members of God’s Church,**

King Croesus of Lydia had a hand in making Sardis a great city. Sardis was the capital of Lydia but it was during the reign of King Croesus that the people of Sardis figured out how to separate gold from silver. In other words, they came up with a purification process that allowed them to separate the two metals and that enabled them to make pure silver coins or pure gold coins. This created a revolutionary economical change to using coins as currency.

King Croesus is also known for attacking Persia during his reign but it was his lack of attention that brought about his downfall. He didn’t do well against the Persians and as was the custom, when winter came he assumed the fighting would take a break. He retreated to his capital city thinking the Persians would do the same, but they didn’t. Imagine Croesus’ surprise when the Persians invaded his city one night and he woke up the next morning with Persian soldiers in his bedroom. His downfall came because he wasn’t paying attention.

Six hundred years after King Croesus, it appears that the people of Sardis are once again not paying attention and once again the outcome might be devastating.

I would guess that in a few days, even less, you may forget the name of King Croesus but as we consider John’s words to the church in Sardis, I hope you are paying attention to his **“Wake Up Call.”** May we wake up and **pay attention to what is going on around us** and may we wake up **to the promises that God has reserved for his faithful followers.**

**I.** At the beginning of the book of Revelation we have seven letters to seven churches. Two of the letters pointed out the faithfulness of the congregations they were written to, but the other five letters contained a two part message – what they were doing well and what actions were taking them down a path away from God.

**“You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”** What if someone said that to you? How would you respond? It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that John was talking about their spiritual life, but how could they appear alive spiritually if they were actually spiritually dead?

Obviously this was a congregation with a lot going on. It appears that this was a large congregation. Maybe they were expanding and had a vibrant building program. Maybe they had a program to help the needy. John doesn't mention problems with false prophets or sexual immorality as in a few other letters so it doesn't appear that they had defiant sinners in their midst, so with so much activity, why does John say they are dead?

It seems that they were trying to "do the right thing" and there are a lot of churches like that today and a lot of organizations but the key question is, "Why are you trying to do the right thing?" At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees thought they were doing the right thing too but everything they did was motivated by their pride and trying to make themselves look good. What about the people in the church in Sardis?

From this portion of scripture we have to assume that somewhere along the line their motivation for doing the right thing had shifted – maybe they were focused on how large a congregation they could build or on how good they looked to the community, but apparently they had lost sight of Jesus and the cross. When that happens, scripture tells us that all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

Does that mean we shouldn't do good works? Obviously not but John is calling out to us with a wakeup call – Now is the time to do a soul check. Is the work you do all about you or about Christ. Or how about the times you are asked to help with a project or committee? A lot of times people say "no" because it is all about them – they just don't feel like it or have better things to do for themselves. At times when you are asked to serve, remember how Christ served you by giving his life up for you. He served us because of his great love for us and that is why we should want to serve him – because of our love for what he has done for us.

Wake up and pay attention to what is going on around you and what you yourself are doing. **"If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."** If we don't pay attention to our spiritual lives and how we live them, we won't be prepared when our life here on this earth is over. Your life isn't about you, it's all about your relationship with God. Your faith in him, and the life you live for him. That's why John continues with some good news for us, "Wake up and listen to the promises God has reserved for you."

**II. "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent."** The congregation at Sardis has received the same message that you have. **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself."** (Matthew 22:37-39) We fall short of that command every day but the good news is, **"God made him [his Son] who was without sin to be sin for you so that in him [Jesus] we might have the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) The love of Christ who died on the cross for our sins has changed our hearts so that we can come repenting of our sins and receiving his forgiveness. We can't love God and neighbor perfectly but Christ stepped in and did this for us while he was here on this earth.

John described some members of the church this way, **"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they**

**are worthy.”** It’s not that they had never sinned but that they were faithful to God and their sins had been forgiven. That is why they were dressed in white robes – what we sometimes describe as a robe of righteousness.

So what do your clothes look like? Are the stains of your sins evident? Maybe you are living together outside of marriage. Maybe you worry needlessly and have doubts. Maybe you can’t keep a secret and you are stained with the sin of gossip. Maybe you take everything in the worst possible way instead of putting the best construction on something as the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment directs us.

We all have more than enough sinful stains and we don’t want anyone to see them. Some are more visible than others. But we all want that white robe of righteousness to cover our stains. The robe washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. That can only come to us through faith. It can only come as we repent of our sins and turn to God. And repentance means to try and turn from that sin too – to make a change in our life. As we turn to God he assures us that our sin is forgiven and our name is written in the book of life.

God reserves a place in heaven for all those who remain faithful. So are we awake! What next? How does that robe of righteousness come to us and how do we keep it and how do we make sure our name is written in the Book of Life? The answer is simple. John says, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** We can’t buy or manufacture our white robe of righteousness – only Christ can clothe us with that robe and as we listen to him he does drop that robe over our heads and covers our sins with forgiveness. As we listen to our Savior and see his love for us, then and only then, are we able to respond to his word with a life of good works motivated by his love.

Listen to God’s Wake up Call. Pay attention to what is going on around you and especially to what God has done for you and how that affects your life. And rejoice because you are receiving the benefit of the promises that God has reserved for his faithful people. Amen.