

Revelation
3:1-13
“Dead or alive churches”

I. Intro

II. Vs. 1-6 Those who came our dead

III. Vs. 7-13 Those given an open door

I. Intro

This is Jesus’ 5th letter to the church and is addressed to Sardis, which means, “*escaping ones*” or remnant. Sardis was the capital of the region known as Lydia, which was, located 50 miles east of Ephesus at a junction of five main roads. The fortress of the city sat atop a 1500-foot plateau and was thought to be impregnable, but history would prove that theory wrong twice as sentries fell asleep while keeping watch. The city’s chief god was Artemis who was thought to be able to restore people back from the dead. The chief manufacturing product of Sardis was wool garments, and you can see these two things reflected in Jesus’ words to this church in verses 1 and 4.

The time frame in church history that this fits is 1500-1700 called the reformation. Most often it is called the protestant reformation when in reality Catholics started the reformation. Luther and others were tired of being under the repressive state religions run by corrupt popes. Though people followed these brave men out of Roman Catholicism in the end most of the people joined the movement based upon intellectual agreement rather than a personal relationship with Jesus. **The outcome of this was great creeds and confessions that established formalism that favored ceremonies and systems which became denominations that worshiped their system above their savior!** Donald G. Barnhouse observes, “*There is nothing wrong with the Westminster confession, but if you go throughout Christianity you will find the gospel in a box called a coffin; yes there are believers, but all too often dead formal orthodoxy characterizes their devotion!*”

II. Vs. 1-6 Those who came our dead

Vs. 1a **Author**: As in all of His letters to these Churches Jesus’ identification points to what they need. This reference was already mentioned in 1:4 and traced back to Isa. 9 where the “*seven Spirits of God*” speak of the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the stars refer to the pastors or messengers. The need of this church was like that of the reformation in that they needed to understand the work of the Holy Spirit and for the leadership of the Church to more fully submit to Him who holds them! **As this relates to us, Jesus wants control of our hearts as well of His church. Our profession without His complete possession is just mere religion.** Even though we may be busy, like this church and this church age, all of the business apart from the power of the Holy Spirit will never bring life! The Holy Spirit is not a program, He is a person, and we are told in Eph. 4:25-32 ten things in our life that will grieve Him:

1. Vs. 25 Lying or “exaggerating”
2. Vs. 27 Giving opportunity to the devil, “compromise”
3. Vs. 28 Stealing
4. Vs. 29 Corrupt communications, “anything that does not buildup”
5. Vs. 31 Bitterness

6. Vs. 31 Wrath
7. Vs. 31 Anger
8. Vs. 31 Loud quarreling
9. Vs. 31 evil speaking
10. Vs. 32 Not being forgiving

No amount of profession can help this only repentance can!

Vs. 1b **Admonition**: Jesus said this church had a “name” that they were alive but were in fact dead. **Their reputation from the outside was impressive, they had activity but still they lacked true power. Their name was before men not God, as such they were more into their results than they were their relationship. Jesus can easily tell the difference between a corpse in a white tux and a servant in a white robe!**

Vs. 2-3 **Accusation and Appeal**:

Accusation:

- a. Vs. 2b “*I have not found your works perfect before God.*” No matter how alive they thought they were Jesus says, they were on their last breaths. The word “*perfect*” means, “*not fulfilled*”, they had not lived up to God’s design and stopped short. **This complacency led to compromise and compromise lead to corruption and corruption was about to lead them into a casket.** The world often views Christians as neither **dangerous** nor **desirable**, instead just **decent** people with **a dying witness** thus a **decaying ministry!**
- b. Vs. 3b “*Therefore if you do not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.*” This city was well aware of its own history of slumbering sentries, so Jesus uses it to remind them of even a greater problem of them falling asleep while guarding the fortress, **falling asleep while guarding your heart.** Our response to the soon return of Jesus serves as a great indicator as to our spiritual condition and the Bible speaks of three reactions:
 1. Rev. 3:3 **Fear** “*I will come upon you as a thief*”: If someone were to break into your house your first reaction would be fear. But why fear? Well because of lack of recognition! Now, when I come home after work and walk into the house my wife does not run to the closet with the phone to dial 911.
 2. 2 Peter 3: 3-4 **Indifference** “*that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."*” The second reaction is just indifference and Peter says it is because of those that are walking according to their own lusts. If I came home and said, “*Honey I’m home!*” And my wife responded, “*So? You’ve been coming home for years and nothing changes!! What’s the big deal?*” I think we would not have a very good relationship.
 3. Rev. 22:20 **Anticipation** “*Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” John’s response to Jesus’ words is, “***So be it, even so, come, Lord Jesus***”. You can just hear the excitement in those words. ***I’ve got to tell you that I love coming home to my wife she makes it my favorite time of the day.***
 - If we are not excited about being in the presence of the Lord and are instead afraid then that might indicate that you don’t know Him, He’s a stranger to you.
 - If you are indifferent towards being in His presence then that might indicate that there is something that has interrupt or damaged your fellowship with Him!

What do we do if that is the case? Jesus gives us five things to revive the dead:

Appeal:

1. Vs. 2a “*Be watchful*”: Wake up! That’s always the first step to personal renewal wake up and recognize that there is something wrong.
2. Vs. 2b “*Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God*”: Whatever life there is cultivate it, strengthen it to make it healthy again.
3. Vs. 3a “*Remember therefore how you have received and heard*”: This is similar council that Jesus gave the church at Ephesus. Look back at when there was life and remember how your heart acted like that of a little child’s.
4. Vs. 3b “*Hold fast*”: Don’t give up, be consistent, and keep going.
5. Vs. 3c “*Repent*”: Tell Him what He already knows, and turn from any area that is wrong.

Vs. 4 **Approval:** There was a remnant that had remained pure as white is the color for righteousness. Jesus says, even in Sardis there were a few that had walked with Him in purity and because of that they are given the promise of walking with Him in the future.

Vs. 5 The “***overcomer***” is defined for us by John in 1 John 5:5 and is he who will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The book of life has been written before the foundations of the world, (Rev. 17:8). And the names of those written in it we are told are follow workers in the gospel (Phil 4:3). I have often wondered since God is not willing that any should perish and that all should have everlasting life if every does not start out with their name in the book of life and rather chose to have it removed. It seems such based upon this verse.

III. Vs. 7-13 Those given an open door

In Jesus 6th letter to His church, you will notice not one word of condemnation in the seven verses here. Philadelphia, “*love of the brethren*” was located 30 miles southeast of Sardis and was prone to earthquakes. It was not an important city nor a large city, its only claim was that it was the gateway to the east. In the eyes of the world, it may have had little strength but in the eyes of our Lord He set before it an open door. Historically this would match the evangelical church of 1520 to the present day. During this period of church history such people as, Hudson Taylor, William Carry, and Amy Carmichael have carried the gospel around the world. The great challenge of this church is not that there is not any open doors but rather that there are too few people to go through them. Far too often the ones that do go through do so in their own strength.

Vs. 7 **Author:** Since there is no word of correction to this Church Jesus’ description of Himself is meant to encourage them. Perhaps because of their location or the view others had of them they did not think that their work for the Lord mattered much because they were so small and weak. Jesus reveals **three things of encouragement based upon His character:** “These things says”

- a. “*He who is holy*”: Above every other aspect of His character Jesus is holy, in other words He always does right, He is free from any defilement and cannot do wrong!
- b. “*He who is true*”: The idea is that of right conduct, in other words always does right. It is interesting to see how conduct always seems to follow character. Jesus is perfect in who He is therefore He is perfect in what He does. To the Church little in size He declares that this is not a problem with Him indeed it is an asset.
- c. “*He who has the key of David, He who opens, and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*”: This is a reference to Isa. 22:22 where God spoke to Eliakim the High priest about the authority He was going to give him. Hezekiah was the King, and the

Assyrians were marching upon Jerusalem and the inhabitants of the city instead of repenting were having an “*eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*” attitude. The keys were to the treasury of David, and he was giving the authority to distribute the provisions as needed. To this Church Jesus shows Himself with absolute authority to give as He sees fit no matter what their position was in the world’s eyes He saw them as the ones He desired to use. The point is “*We must never let what we don’t have keep us from what we must do!*”

Vs. 8 **Approval:** To this Church of little strength Jesus provides an open door. An open door speaks of an opportunity for ministry and what’s greater still is this door is not only open but cannot be shut! *Three things no doubt contributed to their success:*

- a. “*You have a little strength*”: The word little means unimportant and is the same word used of Jesus when He speaks of Zacchaeus. It speaks of how the world sizes up people and things. How did their being little aide in their success? *It made them totally dependent upon the Lord. Jesus knows that our effectiveness lies upon our understanding our condition, which is weak, so that we can only trust in His strength.* Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 12:10 “*I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”
- b. “*Have kept My word*”: *They consistently centered their lives on obedience to His word.*
- c. “*Have not denied My name*”: They keep Jesus the main thing! *Their identity never wavered as it was all about becoming more like Him.*

To the Church that is dependent upon Him, only wants to be like Him and just wants to be known in Him; there will always be an open door of ministry that no one can shut and not even the gates of Hades shall prevail against it, a fact that is brought out in verse 9.

Vs. 9 The first promise Jesus makes to this church is that He will take care of its enemies. They are not our enemies but His. Nothing can or will be able to thwart His plans or opportunities. This church was up against a false system of worship and Jesus says because you worship Me and are seated with me in heavenly places they are going to come before us and worship at our feet. The world saw this little church and thought because of their size they were unloved by the Lord, but nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus already told them He alone held the keys, thus where unbelief sees obstacles faith sees opportunities. Since the Lord will take care of all of

those who oppose us all we have are opportunities. Jesus promises to strengthen this church, to use this church and now He promises them victory.

Vs. 10-11 **Accreditation**: Here is another great promise based upon their obedience to persevere trusting in His strength. Several things to not about this promise:

- a. *“I also will keep you from”*: The word *“from”* means *“out of”* not through. In other words, Jesus promise to this Church is to keep us out of the trial that will come upon the world to test the world.
- b. *“The hour of trial”*: The word hour is a word that represents a very specific time period. The promise to take them from the very hour or time period.
- c. *“Which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth”*: It is very obvious that this is a reference to the great tribulation, which we will see in chapters 6-19.

In summation this promise is not to bring us through the tribulation, nor is it to be removed out of the trial of the tribulation but rather to be taken from the very time period altogether.

Vs. 11 So what should this church do in light of this promise? Well Jesus tells them *“I’m coming quickly”* so hold fast what you have. The crown always refers to rewards, not salvation, so **Jesus is saying stay the course you’re on tell I come for you!**

Vs. 12-13 **Accommodation**: They are not only promised a crown but to stand in His presence forever. In Solomon’s temple there were two pillars that he was to give names, Jachin *“God establishes”* and Boaz *“Strength”*. The Lord Himself will write on us His new name and we will never again go out into the world. **Our identity will be established threefold:**

- a. Name of My God
- b. The name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God.
- c. And I will write on him My new name.