

Finishing Well

Lesson #46 Wake Up! Be Watchful! Nov. 29, 2023

Rev. 3:1-4 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect [complete, mature] before God.

³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.⁴ Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

The church in Sardis had a reputation for spiritual vitality, but it was nothing more than an image. The church was on life support and didn't even know it. Jesus' message to them: Wake up from your complacency about sin and take corrective action before it is too late. George Eldon Ladd defined the Sardis church as "a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power."

Paganism of Sardis

Sardis had a complex of pagan religions which emphasized the healing power of their gods. These "gods" had the ability to restore life. Two miles outside of Sardis was a hot springs where they believed the gods manifested their life-giving power. The people of Sardis went out to the hot springs to get life. How ironic! The pagan religions celebrated the ability of their false gods to give life and the true church with the true God was dead.

Sardis was the center of pagan worship and the site of a great temple to the goddess Artemis. Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele, a primal nature goddess worshipped with orgiastic rites. No temple worshiper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments.

A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods.

Rev. 3:4-5a 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.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;

City Of Sardis in John's Time

In John's time it was a famous and wealthy city on the decline [a shell of what it had been]. Sardis was dying because the people had grown lazy, degenerate, immoral, complacent and apathetic. The name Sardis became synonymous with promise without performance; appearance without reality; false confidence that heralded ruin. Sardis, proud of its reputation and its past, was apparently trying to ride on the reputation of the past.

Suffering from neglect and indifference, its reputation was all it had left.
For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived.
They betrayed themselves by lack of watchfulness and diligence.

Church of Sardis in John's Time: Reputed to be alive, Sardis is in fact a dead church.

There seems to be no evidence, in an era of growing Roman persecution, the church at Sardis experienced persecution, corrupt theology or false teachers.

It had a good reputation and a name it was alive, but the claim was a lie.

You are dead! There was no spiritual life in the church.

Why did both Jews and Romans leave this church untouched when they so vigorously persecuted their neighbors?

1. There wasn't a reason to persecute this church! They were already in Satan's domain.

2. Another answer may be its lack of aggressive and positive Christianity.

Simply put, *Sardis was the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.*

The church had become a thermometer that registered the temperature of the city instead of a thermostat that changed the temperature of the city.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, and the Lord is not deceived."

The church needed to stir up the living Spirit of God to come to life.

Denis Lyle: Tragically many churches are dead. They have the foul stench of death on them.

They have the appearance of life, but they are in actuality, DEAD. Their sanctuary is a morgue with a steeple. Their congregation is full of corpse. They have undertakers for ushers; embalmers for elders and morticians for ministers. The pastor graduated from the Cemetery. The choir leader is the local coroner, and they sing *Embalmed in Gilead*.

Their favorite belief and theology: The dead in Christ will rise first.

Strategic Location: Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense.

The original city sat on top of a 1,500' high plateau with one narrow road leading into the city.

The other sides of the plateau were just steep cliffs almost impossible to scale.

Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice:

- first by Cyrus the Great in 549 BC and by Antiochus the Great in 218 BC.

Their enemies should not have been able to defeat them.

As a fortress with great defense, they had everything they needed for victory.

Why? Its arrogance and overconfidence manifested in failing to keep an adequate watch.

Rev.3:2-3 Be watchful... 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.

When Sardis came under attack by Cyrus the Persian, King Croesus and his people retreated to their city, put a detail at one place, and believed they were safe. One night, one of the Persian soldiers saw a Sardinian soldier drop his helmet over the wall of the city. He watched as that soldier followed a hidden path down the side of the mountain to retrieve his helmet. When nightfall came, Cyrus and his troops followed the hidden path up the side of the mountain, entered the city while the guards slept and conquered Sardis.

➤ It was taken "like a thief in the night."

A great Old Testament analogy is Samson, the charming hero of Israel in the dark, dark days of their history. He was the greatest champion of freedom and the strongest man that ever lived. His name is synonymous with strength and courage due to his many feats and exploits. Beguiled by Delilah who cut his hair, he lost his strength. The haircut symbolized his unwillingness to obey God. Due to disobedience, God took his strength away.

➤ When he was confronted with danger and tried to meet it, he could not overcome.

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!"

But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

Consider: It was the same old Samson with the same living name that was synonymous with strength, but the power was gone. The result was Samson's defeat, imprisonment, blindness and death. That miserable wreck, that pitiful, blind giant tied with two brass chains stooping over a grinding mill in the prison of Gaza is depicted as one tragic figure.

That was Sardis, once strong, once virile, once alive, once a powerful church began to sow sin. They became weak, blind, dead and were bound in brass chains grinding the grain of sin's prison, not even knowing that God had long since departed.

Prov. 22:8 He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.

Jesus comes to this lazy, apathetic, complacent church with no words of commendation.

Apparently, Sardis started out strong, doing good works, as noted in the letter of "having a name" and "strengthen the things that remain." Somehow, they wavered or faltered and failed to persevere, lack of watchfulness and diligence.

Consider: The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost. [Acts 2]. Its life comes only from the Spirit of God.

Jesus Said: You have a name you are alive, but you are DEAD.

Problem: Currently, you are not experiencing what you actually possess because you have grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit, resulting in a loss of the power of the Holy Spirit to infuse Christ's life.

A dead church does not have the benefit of the living power of the Holy Spirit, nor does it have godly leaders who manifest the life and power of God.

Result: Sardis, dominated by the flesh, sin and unbelief, was devoid of the Spirit.

Your lamp of faith is extinguished.

William Barclay, historic commentator of the Scriptures, relates a fable in which three of the devil's apprentices were coming to earth to finish their apprenticeships.

They were talking to Satan about their plans to tempt and ruin man.

Devil #1: I will tell them, "There is no God."

Satan's reply: That won't delude anyone. They KNOW there is a God.

Devil #2: I will tell them, "There is no hell."

Satan: You will deceive no one. They know deep down there is a hell and punishment for sin.

Devil #3: I will tell them, "There is no hurry."

Satan's reply: You will ruin men by the thousands.

The most dangerous delusion is that there is plenty of time.

Rev. 3:3 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 - There is a consequence for the unwatchful believer.

The word translated "watch" here is from the Greek word "tereo" (tereo) which means to be alert and on guard.

SLEEPY SAINTS by A W Pink: What an anomaly! Drowsing on the verge of eternity!

A Christian has been: (1) awakened from the sleep of death in trespasses and sins,

(2) made to realize the unspeakable awfulness of endless misery in hell

(3) the indescribable joy of everlasting bliss in heaven, and

(4) thereby brought to recognize the seriousness and solemnity of life.

(5) He has been taught experientially the worthlessness of all mundane things and the

preciousness of Divine things. He has turned his back on Vanity Fair and has started out on his journey to the Celestial City [Phil. 3:20-21].

(6) He has been quickened into newness of life [Rom 6:4].

(7) He has been supplied with the most powerful incentives to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus

➤ Matt. 25:21, 23; II Cor. 5:10; I Cor. 3:11-15; Phil. 3:14

Nevertheless, it is sadly possible for him: (1) to suffer a relapse,

(2) for his zeal to abate Heb. 6:11-12

(3) his graces to languish

(4) for him to leave his first love Rev. 2:4-5

(5) become weary of well-doing II Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:9

Warning: Unless he is on his guard, drowsiness will steal over him, and he will fall asleep.

Slumber Spiritually: inattentive to our walk with God, lazy about our spiritual development, slack in our disciplines of prayer and Bible reading.

➤ Heb. 3:13 Corruptions still indwell in him, and sin has a stupefying effect.

➤ Gal. 1:4 He is yet in this evil world. It exerts an enervating influence on him.
feel drained of energy or vitality.

- I Pet. 5:8 Satan seeks to devour him. Unless resisted steadfastly, Satan will hypnotize him. [James 4:6-7; Eph. 6:11-13]

Thus, the menace of this spiritual "sleeping sickness" is very real.

Slumbering saints! Taking their ease while threatened by danger!

- I Tim. 6:12 Lazy instead of fighting the good fight of faith
- Matt. 5:16; Col. 4:5 Trifling away opportunities to glorify their Savior.
- Eph. 5:16 Do not redeem the time.
- Rev. 14:13; 22:12 Rusting, instead of wearing out in His service.

We speak with wonderment and horror of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, but far more startling and reprehensible is a careless Christian who has departed from God, bewitched by a world which is doomed to eternal destruction [I John 2:17, II Pet. 3:10-11].

Such a travesty and tragedy is far from being exceptional.

Both observation and the teaching of Scripture prove it to be a common occurrence.

Howard Hendricks: Dallas Theological: After an exhaustive study of the men and women of the Bible, [about 100 detailed biographies], found about 2/3 of them ended poorly due to immorality and/or drifting.

Such passages as the following make it only too evident: *The People Of God Are Thus Overcome*. Each of these calls is made to the saints.

Rom. 13:11 It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. [3 tenses of salvation; II Cor. 1:10]

I Cor. 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

Eph. 5:14 Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

I Thess. 5:6-11 Paul admonishes the believer to WAIT UP for Christ's return by behaving in a godly way. Don't be caught off guard. The Biblical idea of waiting is **HIGHLY ACTIVE**.

I Thess. 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

I Thess. 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch [alert] and be sober.

Note: Sleep = *katheudo* = refers to spiritual lethargy and negligence with a view to Christ's return > To be spiritually asleep with the result that one becomes secure and unconcerned in sin as well as indolent and careless in the performance of the call on his life and the work God has prepared for him to accomplish.

I Thess. 5:8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. [armor to protect us]

Faith and love are like a breastplate that covers the heart: faith toward God, and love toward God's people. Hope is a sturdy helmet that protects the mind.

Dedicated believers: Col. 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

II Peter 3:3-4 knowing this first: 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."

Four Reasons For Scoffing, Apathy And Indifference Of Christians:

1. Unbelief - Many professing Christians do not believe Jesus will ever return to this earth due to a liberal view of Scripture. They spiritualize the virgin birth and miracles. His return is nothing more than a fairy tale.

2. Ignorance - Many are apathetic due to ignorance regarding His return and the marvelous future He has waiting for believers. Many discredit prophetic teaching; not important.

3. Fear - Many fear His imminent return for believers because of their lifestyle. Many believe in a works salvation and fear He will return on one of their "bad" days.

4. Carnality - Carnal Christians cannot get excited about His return because they are in love with the world. They walk with one foot in church and one in the world. They don't want Him to return until they have experienced all the world and this life offer. Don't mess up my life!

Damaging Beliefs Of Reformation Church:

1. "Soft" hermeneutics > The Bible is not taken literally.

Scripture was allegorized which leads to a loss of meaning and power of God's Word.

2. Denial Of Inerrancy Of Word Of God

3. Denial Of Millennial Reign > Most of these churches do not believe in a literal 1,000-year reign by Jesus Christ on the earth at His Second Coming. The angel promised Mary she would give birth to a son who would one day rule from David's throne.

This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled and will be during the millennium.

4. Denial Of Israel's Prophetic Destiny > God made 4 unconditional covenants with Israel and Scripture confirms: God Is Not Finished With Israel. Most of these churches believe the Church has replaced Israel because she did not accept the Messiah. Therefore, Israel has no future part to play. This misconception has given rise to very serious anti-Semitism in years past and is on the increase in the world today.

Effect Today: Absence of Biblical devotion > De-emphasis of Gospel of Christ. The gospel message is watered down as words such as "sin" and "repentance" are offensive to the post-modern culture we live in. Messages delivered in churches are about "feel good", "seeker-friendly" and there is a loss of reverence and awe for our powerful and mighty God.

DON'T GET CAUGHT SLEEPING! Most Christians are ignorant and apathetic regarding Bible prophecy and the return of Jesus Christ. Did you know that >1/3 of the Bible is prophecy?

In the Old Testament there are over 1,800 references to Christ's return.

Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to Christ's return - that is 1 out of every 30 verses!

23 of the 27 New Testament books give PROMINENCE to this subject. For every Biblical prophecy concerning Christ's 1st return, there are 8 prophecies about His second coming. In spite of this statistics, most are apathetic and have tuned out prophetic teaching.
Truth: We are called to wise up to end-times doctrine because God expects us to know what He declares in His Word. We will be held accountable for our knowledge or lack thereof. Be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

I Cor. 3:10b-15 But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw*, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of What Sort It Is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Note: This is written to BELIEVERS; they are saved in the end.

Believers who suffer loss = Castaway, disqualified; not worthy of inheriting

Note: Loss= forfeit loss of one's rewards/inheritance >could have been in one's possession

Consider: The thief has come when you weren't ready and watching. You can never lose your justification, but you have forfeited a portion of your full reward and inheritance.

II John 1:8 Look to yourselves, that you do not lose those things you worked for, but *that* you may receive a full reward.

Col. 2:18a Let no one cheat you of your reward... [Let no one defraud you by acting as an umpire *and* declaring you unworthy and disqualifying you for the prize.

I Cor. 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

➤ Tense of verbs call for a continual action on the believer's part.

Be watchful or be vigilant means to live a sanctified life, consciously aware of the coming judgment day. Live in light of eternity.

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

I John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

Question: Can I be ashamed? lose or forfeit all or part of my reward [inheritance]?

May we run the race that is set before us in spirit and truth, looking to Jesus and abiding in Him, for He is our strength and our salvation.