

In the movie the Sixth Sense, Bruce Willis plays a child psychologist name Malcom. His wife is depressed and their marriage is falling apart. He is down because of recent serious professional failures. He begins to help a nine-year old boy name Cole who appears to be abused and Schizophrenic because the young boy claims he sees and speaks to the dead.

As the movie goes on Malcom starts to believe the child, and I'm going to spoil the movie now, but you've had 25 years to see it. Eventually Malcom discovers that he is dead and has been for months. He had simply been going through life and somehow never noticed.

The horror aspect of the movie never bothered me. But I've never been able to shake that idea of how could you go through life and not notice you are dead? Yet, that is exactly what many people who claim to be Christians do.

They claim to be alive. They claim to be followers of Jesus and yet they are just as spiritually dead as the firmest non-believer. This is the problem in the church in Sardis as well in Revelation 3:1-6. They are an entire church that has become dead.

My prayer this morning is that as we examine this text, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us is we might be dead and not even know it.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation 3:1-6.

### **I. Problem: Don't assume you are awake and alive (v. 1-2)**

We cannot assume we are alive.

Too many Christians assume just because decades ago they prayed a prayer.

Or because they were baptized as a child that they are alive.

But we cannot assume that and just float through life doing whatever we want.

This is the central problem of the church in Sardis.

They are going through their life and feel awesome.

They think that they are strong Christians who everyone respects.

But the reality is that they are dead.

They are like the white washed tombs of the Pharisees.

Verse 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.'"**

Why is this the vision of Jesus that they receive?

I think this is partially because this is the words of the Holy Spirit.

The seven spirits is the way John writes about the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is so overflowing in Jesus it is described this way.

And this is how believers are to be.

We are to be full of the Holy Spirit.

To be alive means to have the Holy Spirit living inside of you.

It means to be full and overflowing with the spirit of God.

Jesus is the Lord of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit flows from and is given by Jesus.

The church needs to have more of the spirit come.

But they are not full of the spirit.

And those who are made alive in Christ should be full of the Spirit.

And if you are not, then you may not be alive at all.

The rest of the verse, **"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."**

Notice how this is framed.

It is not necessarily that they think they are alive.

It is that they have a reputation of being alive.

Everyone around them praising their faith.

The people around them talk well of them.

When Sardis comes up in conversations, everyone says what a wonderful church it is.

When Sardis shows up at the conferences, people want to be like them.

The church might have plenty of money.

The church may be growing in attendance.

Maybe the church is baptizing plenty of people.

But Jesus knows the truth.

He knows what their works actually are.

How many times have we seen something like this?

There is a respected leader.

Maybe they are a pastor, political leader, director of a non-profit, a coach, a teacher, and they have a great reputation in the community.

But all of all sudden an article comes out in the news.

Or one person shares a story of how that person actually abused and assaulted them.

And then suddenly the flood gates open more stories come out.

And it can always feel bewildering at times.

Because we thought they had a great reputation.

We thought they were alive.

But the truth was much different and far more darker than we ever would have believed.

This is what is happening in Sardis.

Because God is not fooled by the outward appearance.

We get fooled all the time.

If someone is charismatic and well put together.

If they are likable and say all the right things.

We assume they are awesome.

We think they are full of the Holy Spirit and alive.

But God looks at the heart.

He knows what the works really are.

He knows the works that are done in the dark.

He knows what goes on in the shadows of the church.

Now we might question and wonder what it means to be dead.

Does this mean they have not been made alive by Christ and are not saved?

Does this mean that their faith is on life support?

I think they are like the seed on the ground that is dying.

If they continue on their path.

If they continue in life going as they are without making any changes.

Then they are be spiritually dead.  
And they will be cast out into the fire.  
Sometimes I think we can ask the wrong questions about the Bible.  
Our primary question when we read this letter is not "is it possible for people to lose their salvation?"  
The question we should be asking is "am I alive, or do I only have the reputation of life?"

I believe people cannot lose their salvation.  
I believe we receive it as a gift and grace from God.  
God chooses us from before the foundations of the world.  
We don't do anything to earn it and we cannot do anything to lose it.

But the reality is that we do not know who is and who is not saved.  
That is not something human beings have the ability to do.  
We can guess, we can make decisions,  
but Jesus is the only one who knows His sheep.

Salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone.  
But the way that we can tell whether or not you have professed faith.  
Or whether or not Christ has made you alive is by your works.  
When you put your faith in Jesus and He makes you alive, it changes you.  
That means you start to talk about Jesus, you think about Jesus, you sing about Jesus, you start working differently.  
Everything about your life should be different.  
It does not mean it is all perfect and holy now.  
But, it does mean that you can tell.  
Those who are alive look different.  
And if they don't, how I am supposed to believe you love Christ?

This is why works are important.  
They do not earn our salvation, but they are the outcome of our salvation.  
But what is tricky.  
And this is where Sardis has gotten in trouble.

Just because you do the right things, or you do works.  
Just because you do Jesusy things does not mean you know Jesus.  
You may still be dead.

Look at the second half of verse 2.

Verse 2, **"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."**

They have works.

They have been showing some of the fruit or evidence of faith and life.

But God says that it is incomplete.

What is it that makes these works incomplete?

They can be doing the right works in the wrong way.

Jesus tells us to correct sinners in gentleness.

You could correct them, but harshly and be in sin.

You can do the right works without the right love.

This was the church in Ephesus' problem.

They did all the right things, but they had no love.

If you preach the gospel, but you don't love or care for the people you are preaching to, that is a problem.

We have to do the works Christ asks, while being filled with a love for Jesus and for our neighbors.

We have to do the right works at the right time.

There is a time and a season for everything.

Often times we get into trouble when we do something God asks us to do, but we don't do it when we should.

We don't use wisdom.

We especially do this towards the hurting and lost.

Job's friends needed to comfort him.

There may have been a day when he needed to be reminded of theology and right thinking.

But that was not the time.

Or we can do the right works, but we go too far and to the extreme.  
We are so passionate about sharing the gospel with the lost that now we are incapable of listening and getting to know the lost person in front of us.

All of these are ways our good works can be incomplete.  
I don't know which one of these was Sardis' problem.  
I don't think we are supposed to know.  
Because we need to see ourselves in their place.  
We need to ask ourselves and take inventory.  
Is our faith on life support and dying?

We also need to be careful to not assume that others around us are alive.  
This is one of the dangers in living in largely Christian places.  
This has also been the problem in communities, cities, nations, and empires that claim to be Christian.  
You get it a place like that and everyone just assumes we are alive.  
We assume that someone is alive because they say they are a Christian.  
We assume they are born again because they have some good works.

I remember talking to a couple that I kind of knew in Nebraska.  
They had a great reputation and everyone loved them.  
They were Christians and even some leaders at a local church.  
Something happened at the church they were at and they moved and started attending our church.  
And after a few weeks they started to change.  
And they said that they felt like they were actually growing in their faith.  
They couldn't believe it.  
Because it suddenly seemed like for the last 20 years they had just been coasting.  
That they were not actually alive.  
I think that is true for a lot of people.  
They don't realize how close to death they are.  
Because everything seems good.

But they need to wake up.  
But how often are people and are we just like Sardis?  
There are plenty of people in our community who have the reputation of being alive, but they are dead.  
And this is a terrible danger.

## **II. Wake up before the death is complete (v. 2-3)**

The danger is that this death can set all the way in.  
There is a point in time where it is not too late.  
Where the dead can wake up.  
But if they wait too long, then hope is lost.  
Verse 2, **"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."**  
Jesus says, that they are dead. But he encourages them to wake up.  
I love this, because this is how Jesus raises the dead.  
He tells the little girl to arise.  
He calls Lazarus to come out.  
With Jesus, death only has to be temporary.

This is why Jesus says, they are dead and yet only sleeping.  
There is something remaining that is about to die.  
But if they can wake up and repent, then they can be alive again.

It reminds me of a great scene from the classic film the Princess Bride.  
The hero has died and they take him to a weird guy named Miracle Max.  
And this guy says he has good news.  
The hero "is only MOSTLY dead. There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive."  
That seems like some of what Jesus is doing.  
Sardis is mostly dead.  
But they can wake up.  
They can be alive and find salvation and faith again.

But this is not something we can do on our own.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit.

We need the power of Jesus.

We need to pray and ask the Spirit would soften our hearts and bring us back.

Because this is not something we can do on our own efforts.

And we need to awaken.

It can be hard to awaken when you want to sleep isn't it.

I am not getting a lot of sleep these days.

It is hard to rest when you have a newborn and young children.

I would love nothing more than to drift off to sleep and not wake up for a whole day.

There are moments when I hear my kids calling my name out.

Or Brianna is shaking me saying it's time to change Quinn's diaper.

And I can feel my body still asleep.

I can feel that if I don't move I can just drift back.

And I have to choose to wake up.

To shake out the stiffness.

To begin to move and slowly wake up.

But it always takes a choice.

That is the same choice Sardis has.

Will they wake up?

Or will they pretend to ignore Christ's call and drift back to sleep?

Will they find it easier to continue in their sins.

The Holy Spirit is calling.

And He is trying to wake them up.

To keep them from disaster and despair.

But they must wake up.

Verse 3, **"Remember then, what you receive 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."**



They need to go back and remember the gospel.  
Part of when we drift to sleep.  
When our faith begins to fade and die.  
It seems to come when we forget the gospel.  
When the foundations of our faith seem boring and we move on to the deep things.  
When we want to learn about anything other than Christ crucified.

But Jesus wants them to remember the faith.  
Return to the foundations.  
And keep that.  
And to repent of their sins.  
To turn from their false works in the dark.  
Because deadness means there is something they need to repent of.

But if they choose to not wake up.  
If they want to remain sleep walking through life.  
Following Jesus on auto pilot, then there are consequences.  
Jesus will come against them like a thief.

This doesn't mean it will be secret, but unexpected.  
His judgment will face them.  
He will oppose them and it will surprise them.

And this statement would have caught Sardis' attention.  
Because as a city they have been caught and attacked twice.  
The first time, Cyrus a Persian came and tried to attack the city but was beaten back.  
The city was considered a strong fortress because part of the city faced a mountain.  
And that side looked like a cliff that was impenetrable.  
The city was proud of how strong that side was.  
They would boast of it.

And they barely put any troops there.

But one Persian soldier saw a Sardis guard drop his helmet and walk down to get it.

So he knew there had to be some secret passage. He took troops and climbed it.

Most of the army followed and before Sardis was ready, they were already defeated and the entire city was burned.

You would think they learned from that incident.

But Antiochus years later did the same exact thing.

He attacked the wall where it was unguarded and won again.

A place where Sardis thought they were strong was their weakness.

The same is true for the church.

They believe they are alive and strong, but are dead.

And they will be as surprised by God one day as they were by those armies.

If they do not wake up.

Usually for me, deadness has come when I have been refusing to do something.

Maybe I have been refusing to engage God's Word.

Or there is a step in faith I know I am supposed to make, but I don't want to.

And it is only after repentance that life and faith can return.

If you haven't been to church in 10 years, you are probably dead.

If you haven't been praying or reading the Bible you are probably dead.

Those who are asleep, you know what the problem is.

You know the secret sin you are hiding.

You know the works you are not doing.

You know the gospel you have abandoned.

If you are dead, you know it in your heart.

If you are willing to be honest with yourself, you know exactly where you are spiritually and what has happened.

If you don't know, I have great news.  
Ask Jesus, and He will show you.  
He will take your hand and help you awaken.  
You do not have to do it on your own.  
Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to make you alive.  
You don't need to do it on your own.  
But you do need to wake up.

### **III. Those who wake up will never lose their salvation (v. 4-6).**

All those who are awake.  
Those who live lives marked by repentance and faith.  
They can never have salvation taken from them.

There are those who are not dead.  
There are those few who have still been clinging to life.  
They have not fallen into the trap of others.

Verse 4, **"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."**

God always leaves a remnant.  
Even when there are places filled with evil, God has some faithful.

Mr. Rogers used to encourage children in times of hardship to look for the helpers.

To look for the people who are trying to make things better even in times of disaster.

In times of evil, we need to look for the remnant.  
There are some in Sardis alive.

And look at how they are described.  
They have not soiled their garments.

This is another way to speak about sin.  
They have not ruined their clothes.  
Instead they are still clothed in white.  
And they will walk with Jesus in white one day.

Because they are worthy.  
Now this does not mean these people never sin.  
It is not that they have never misstepped and fallen.  
It does not mean they have never stumbled in the Christian life.

But it means that they clean themselves.  
Our clothes usually get dirty.  
I don't know about you, but I have to regularly wash my clothes.  
I don't get too dirty.  
I don't work outside in the oil and dirt.  
But I sweat and my clothes start to smell.  
My daughter spits up on my shirt.  
Things happen, but my clothes look mostly clean today.  
Not because I have regularly kept these clean.  
But because I change my clothes.  
And because I wash them regularly.

That is what Christ calls for.  
We need to continually come and be renewed.  
We need Jesus to wash away the stains of our sin.  
We need for Christ to give us new clothes and a fresh start.

Baptism was usually done in white robes.  
This is why I still love to wear that white robe Brad would have for baptism.  
Because it is a reminder and a sign.  
In baptism, Christ takes our old clothes and rags and makes us new.

Verse 5, **"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."**

In this letter, those who conquer are those who stay alive.

Who keep their faith alive and hold onto Christ.

They will be clothed in the white garments.

These are garments made by the lamb of God.

This is wool that will never stain.

These are the garments that never need changing.

Because this is what Christ does for us.

The name cannot be blotted out.

Because there are books their names have been blotted out of.

One of those books is in the synagogue.

It has the names of the members of the Jewish community.

And Jews who became Christians.

Jews who believed their Scriptures and recognized that Jesus was the Messiah who was promised.

Those Jews would have their names blotted out of the book.

This is why the synagogues are mentioned so often in these letters, because this has been happening to them.

We also know that the names of citizens were written in a book.

And one of the places that had these records was reportedly in Sardis.

And citizens could have their names blotted out of the book.

If they became criminals.

If they got on the wrong side of the authorities.

Citizenship was something you could lose and could be taken away.

Your name could be blotted out of the book.

This is not the threat that some believers can lose their salvation.

The church on this side is made up of true converts and false ones.

Only God knows.

But the book has the true name written inside.

This is not Christ saying he will remove some names, this is Him affirming that no one written inside can ever go away.

Jesus is contrasting the way His book works to the books they have seen in Sardis.

Those who think this is about the threat of losing your name in the book of life miss the point entirely.

God's book and God's kingdom does not work like the worlds.

In the world your name can be put in and taken out based on what you do.

But God's book, your name can only be entered by Christ.

And once He writes your name in, no one can blot it away.

Not even your own failing.

Jesus will confess the name.

What Jesus says about your name is far more important than what the world says or what your reputation in the world is.

Jesus will acknowledge us before God and before the entirely assembly.

Have you ever entered a place and wished someone would speak for you?

You knew that you were out of place and just hoped you could see someone that you know to let you know it is okay to be here?

That is what Christ will do.

In the heavenly throne room, Jesus will welcome you with a smile and a shout.

And He will announce your name.

Verse 6, **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church."**

Will you hear?

Will you be alive?

Some of you need to hear the warning and turn around before it is too late.

And some of you need to hear the encouragement and hold on.

Where have we been this morning?

Don't assume you are awake and alive (v. 1-2)

Wake up before the death is complete (v. 2-3)

Those who wake up will never lose their salvation (v. 4-6).

All of us need to be awake.

Hear the cry and call of the Holy Spirit.

Do not turn over in your bed.

Do not harden your heart.

Wake up before it is too late.

And those who are awake will live forever.