

Sardis: The Dead Church

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[0:00] Revelation 3, 1-6.

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from the next nearest planet, how far we are away from, you know, the end of our galaxy and whatnot. And so it always helps me keep in mind just how great and vast God is and just how small we are.

And yet God knows us and loves us. It's pretty amazing to think about. When we're talking about traveling in space, they'll talk about, you'll hear people talk about a light year. And a light year means moving more than 186,000 miles per second in a year.

[2:09] Think about that, 186,000 miles a second in a year. The distance works out to more than 6 trillion miles. That's a lot.

So as we look up in the sky on a clear night and gaze up at the stars, we're not seeing the light that those stars are currently producing. Have you had one of those lessons in school or heard astrologers, scientists talk about those things?

So we're not seeing at night, when you go home, if it's clear night and you see the stars, you're not seeing. The light that you're seeing is not the light that those stars are actually producing at this moment.

We're seeing light from 5, 10, and even 20 years ago. In fact, we could be looking at light from decades in the past. Even from stars, we could be looking at light from stars that have burned out long ago, that are no longer stars.

And it could be years or even decades before we realize that that light has gone out, that those stars are no longer in existence.

[3:23] And so I bring up that illustration to tell you that there are many churches today that are in a similar situation. From a distance, it looks like they're shining brightly, but that light is an illusion.

It's merely a reflection of the past. The light was extinguished by sin and false teachers some time ago, such as was the case for the church at Sardis.

From the outside, if you went to this church, if you were viewing things, you would get the impression that there was life. But, as this letter reveals, the Lord declares and pronounces that reality is this church is dead.

So here's the main idea for our study tonight, is that some churches may appear alive, but in reality they are dead. However, God is able to take what is dead and give it new life.

And so you see the parallels from tonight to this morning, that God is able to take what is dead and give it new life. About 30 miles south of Thyatira, Sardis was one of the richest cities in the ancient world.

[4:40] Sardis is reported to be the city that first minted gold and silver coins, which is interesting. They were a very wealthy community. They came under Roman rule more than 100 years before the birth of Christ.

And then in AD 17, it was leveled by a massive earthquake that collapsed the city into rubble. The Roman emperor Tiberius then rebuilt the city, and in return, Sardis became home to a temple that was dedicated in his honor.

And so we see, as we've gone through this study, that this was common for a lot of these cities to do something like that for a Roman emperor. However, the city's primary deity was the goddess Sybil.

And Sybil was the mother of the gods. So while the city continued to prosper under Rome, it never, though, returned to its former glory before all those events that had happened.

Scripture doesn't give us any details on the founding of the church in Sardis. It was likely started again by, as many of these churches were, by Paul during his ministry in Ephesus when he was there.

[5:50] In Acts chapter 19, verse 10, it talks about his time in Ephesus and sheds some light on what he did there. Christ's letter to the church at Sardis, though, stands out in some ways for what it doesn't say.

There is no mention of persecution in this message to this church. There's no mention also of bad theology or false teachers.

There's no discussion of their compromise with the world or any specific sin that he calls them out for that is corrupting the church. But we can reasonably assume that all of these things must have been an issue for this congregation because the Lord says that they'd slid so far down that he describes their current condition as being dead.

You're a dead church. You have a reputation for being alive, but reality is you're dead. So in less than 40 years' time, they'd left their first love like the church in Ephesus had.

They were seduced like the church in Pergamum was, and they had succumbed to corruption like the church in Thyatira had. Because again, how else could they descend so rapidly into the kind of decay that the Lord describes if they had not?

[7:11] In his letter to Sardis, Christ identifies himself in a compelling way. He speaks of himself as being the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

And so as we've seen before in the other messages to these churches, that Christ borrows an imagery from John's initial vision of him to illustrate some specific aspect of his character that reinforces his word, his message to each of these churches in particular.

But the reference to these seven spirits of God points back further than that to John's own greeting to the seven churches in Revelation 1, verse 4.

Where there, he says, It's a phrase he repeatedly uses throughout the book.

He'll use it again in chapter 4, verse 5, and chapter 5, verse 6. But what does it mean? Because we know that there's one Holy Spirit, right?

[8:26] So who are these other six? Well, there are two ways to understand the imagery that is being conveyed here. First, we can go back to Isaiah 11, chapter 2, where there Isaiah describes the Holy Spirit relationship, I should say, to the Messiah.

And there he writes, The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

So there, Isaiah identifies seven key features of the Spirit's empowering work. He is the Spirit of the Lord, as well as the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.

And that's what we commonly, you may have heard referred to as the sevenfold Spirit. Have you ever heard that before? The sevenfold Spirit is talking about those seven aspects of the one Holy Spirit.

And so it's a way to understand the Spirit in his fullness, his power, and his work. And again, seven is a number of completeness, of perfection in the Bible.

[9:41] The other way to understand what Christ means when he says he has the seven spirits of God is a reference to Zachariah's prophetic vision of the Holy Spirit as a golden landstand made up of seven lamps in Zachariah 4, 1 through 10.

In either case, this is certainly a reference to the Holy Spirit who was given to the church by Christ. So, the church at Sardis, the Lord describes himself to them, he describes himself as the one who possesses the Holy Spirit in his fullness and also these seven stars.

And that again is a reference to John's initial vision in chapter 1, verse 16. That depicts the Lord's sovereign care for the messengers of his churches. So, in short, what the author is letting us know is that, what John is letting us know, what Jesus is saying is that he is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to his church.

And he's also the one who gives leaders to his church and they are gifts from him. How does this relate to the church at Sardis?

Well, we might wonder, well, why isn't he coming in judgment yet? Why aren't there references to his eyes of fire or his feet of bronze? We've seen that before in other churches.

[11:08] As we'll see, there's not much judgment in this letter because this church is already dead. So, we see in beginning of verse 1 that Christ describes himself as being the one who possesses what this church needs most in order to come to life, which is the Holy Spirit and faithful shepherds.

Christ describes himself as being the one who possesses what this church needs most in order to come to life, which is the Holy Spirit and faithful shepherds. So, the church at Sardis at this point in time had neither.

They were without the Holy Spirit. They were without qualified pastors or spiritual leaders. Certainly, they had leaders, but these leaders were unsaved.

They didn't know or love the truth. Without the Holy Spirit and faithful spiritual leaders, the church was dead. It was a church dominated by the flesh, a church dominated by sin and unbelief, and mostly it was populated by unbelievers.

The church at Sardis was in a desperate situation, and only Christ was able to give to them what they needed to come back to life. So, in the rest of verse 1, we see that Christ sees the true nature of their hearts.

[12:37] He says, I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. The church at Sardis looked to the naked eye like they were a true church, but Christ saw right through all of that.

He saw right through them, right to their hearts. He knew their deeds. And though they may indicate to the world and to, you know, the people in that church, maybe people in that community that they were alive, their motivations for doing such things were impure.

Where else have we seen this in Scripture? I think of Judas Iscariot. And I think of the night when he left to betray Christ, and Jesus is telling them plainly, one of you will betray me.

And you remember what they said? Who is it? Who could it be? Is it I, Lord? Who is it? You know, they had no idea that it was Judas.

This is how close somebody can be to Christ, to the church, and yet not be saved. Everybody was completely fooled but Christ.

[13:50] Why? Because he's omniscient, because he knows all things, and he knew the true intentions of Judas' heart. So when Christ says that they are dead, he isn't referring merely to physical death as we talked about this morning.

He is talking about the fact that they are spiritually dead people. Ephesians 2.1, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.

It says there, Colossians 2.13, Paul writes, And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

So he can see that this church is an unsaved church. This is a church that does not belong to Him. It belongs truly to the world.

And sadly, we don't want to think that that's the case in our world, but here's a case where it is the case. And so I think if we look on closer inspection at some of the churches that we know of that claim to love the Word of God, they claim to love the Lord, they claim to follow Him, that reality is they are being led by unbelievers, and they are being filled with people primarily occupying the pews who are not saved.

[15:15] The world is full of liberal churches that, so there are some churches like that, that they are imposters and they look that way, and then there are others that we know because they're liberal churches, and we know that there are churches in our society, in our world, that they come out and they say very plainly that they don't believe that the Bible is truly the Word of God.

They don't believe that it is inerrant. In fact, there are pastors and there are churches, they deny the fact that Christ was the Son of God. They deny His atoning work on the cross.

They deny the Gospel. They'll go through the motions of religious ceremony, but there is no spiritual life inside. There is no drive within them to share the Gospel with anyone because they don't even believe it.

I want to share with you a quote by John MacArthur speaking of these things. He says, In a sense, it is easy to spot a dead church. It's a church that is wrapped up in religious tradition, practiced by rote, but devoid of real faith.

It's concerned with liturgy and form, but not true worship. It's a church consumed with healing social ills and promoting public welfare, but not preaching the power of the Gospel to transform lives.

[16 : 35] It's a church that tolerates sin rather than confronting it. It's a church that is more interested in the fashions and opinions of men than the Word of God. It's a church devoted to material things, even vaguely spiritual things, but not the Scripture in its fullness.

It's a church that has no desire for holiness. As mentioned already, this church died quickly within about 40 years.

Do you guys remember? This was a while ago. I don't even remember what we were studying, but I gave you the averages of the average church's lifespan in the United States. Do you remember what it was?

Anybody? Just throw out a guess. 40 years. 40 years. No. 90-95. 90-95. Yeah, Juanita, good job. This isn't the price's light.

Right. What do you bid? 1,000? 1,001. Yeah, about 90 years. So, this was fast when you consider that.

[17 : 38] 40 years, yes, is a long amount of time, but in the life of a church, that's really a quick death. So then we wonder, well, why did it die so quickly?

What causes a church to die so fast? Well, we know from Scripture, we know from cases with these other churches and Christ's warning that false teaching kills the church.

Read through the Bible. Read through the New Testament and you see many warnings from the apostles, from Christ. Beware of false teachers. Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

They will come. A doctrinal error kills the church. Like we've spoken about. Believing that Christ was merely a man and nothing else. Believing that the Bible is not the infallible and errant Word of God.

Things like that will kill a church. Sin kills the church. When we act like sin isn't a big deal, they're just oopsie daisies. They're just mistakes. It's not a big deal. We just want you to come. That kills the church.

[18 : 37] People might come, and again, it might look alive, but that church is really dead. So when those things happen, little by little, cracks begin to form. Over time, they widen, they deepen, and eventually, they tear that church apart.

And as I was thinking about this, I was thinking of two churches that I was familiar with growing up on the same street. And for a time, there was Church A, and everybody went to Church A, and Church A was involved in the community and reaching people, going out, sharing the gospel.

They were solid. And then Church B was kind of the other church, the dinky church, the little church. And if you were mad with Church A, you went to Church B kind of a deal.

Then I left and came back to that community, and I realized, or I saw with my own eyes that Church B was now like Church A used to be, and Church A was now like Church B used to be.

And you wonder, they're on the same street, you know? Different denominations, but the same, you know, for the most part, at least at one point in time, core conservative values and doctrines.

[19 : 50] So what happened to the one and the other? Well, one's dead because those things that they used to see the importance and value of, they no longer saw the value and importance of.

They, because I'm familiar with some things, they began to change their strategies and their worship in order to attract more people in, and maybe that worked for a while, but eventually the substance was so shallow that it was dying.

Whereas this other church was focused on, you know, the Word of God, preaching it, teaching it with accuracy, going and reaching out into their community, letting people know what Christ had done, and there's a case in point where a church dies because it fails to see how important it is to guard against false teachings and false doctrines and against sin, and to make sure that the pastors and the leaders are guiding and directing the congregation to stay true to the Lord and to His Word and to be faithful to what He's called us to do.

So things like that, though, they slowly suffocate the church. Sinful leadership can deliver a quick death blow to a church, and when it compromises with the world, it is on death's doorstep.

Another quote from John MacArthur. He says, contrary to the current trend, there's no better way to introduce the killing power of sin into a church than with an influx of unbelievers.

[21 : 21] I want to read that again. Contrary to the current trend, there's no better way to introduce the killing power of sin into a church than with an influx of unbelievers.

Accepting and putting those unbelievers in positions of leadership grips the church by the neck and strangles it. Ultimately, churches die for one reason, because they tolerate sin.

This includes seminal sin of not taking Scripture seriously. What he's talking about is a church that's desperate to, well, once a person's in here, instead of trying to figure out, okay, are they saved, first of all?

Do they know Christ as their Lord and Savior? What do they know about the Bible? What do they believe about the Bible? Hey, we're happy to see them. Hey, that looks like a nice, young, attractive couple or family or whatnot.

What we need to do is get them to keep coming. So where's an opening? What are they like? Let's try to plug them in right away so that we keep them here. Now, we want people to put their spiritual gifts to use here.

[22 : 23] When you come to a church, when you belong to a church, I believe what the Bible says is that you have gifts and they're not for yourself, they're for everybody else. We all have gifts that God has given us and we are to put them to use in His church for everybody else, ultimately for His glory.

And so, yes, we want people to come in and hopefully if they are believers, this is where God has called them to be, they're in line with what we believe, that they join the church and then they put their spiritual gifts to use, but we're not going to put the cart before the horse where we say, oh, we're so desperate that you're here.

What can we do? What do you want? What do you want to be? What can we do for you? We just want you to keep coming because we could be putting in people in situations that are very dangerous for our church to have them serving in.

Eventually, the church at Sardis was still going through the religious motions. They probably helped with some of the social ills of their city.

They probably tried to do good for their fellow man. Maybe they were charitable and giving to different organizations. They tried to be involved with whatever the social justice aspect of their culture was.

[23 : 33] They were wanting to do things good for the community but ultimately they weren't motivated to do those things for the right reason. So they looked alive but reality was they're dead because they didn't know Christ and they certainly weren't doing those things out of motivation for him whatsoever.

And so they were like filthy rags to him. At the end of verse 2 he says, I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. So again, they're not fooling him with their good works.

He knew their hearts. He knew their motivations. He knew that they were liars. That they weren't telling the truth. Their good deeds could not cover up the stench of their spiritual decay.

The Lord saw right through it. And in a way, I think they were a lot like Samson. Remember Samson from Judges who was the champion of the Israelites against their enemies, the Philistines.

Samson was one of my favorite characters in the Bible in Sunday school because he was like the incredible Hulk of the Bible. You know?

[24 : 43] And so it's interesting because we read those stories as a kid but you know, I didn't realize some other things about Samson until I was an adult, until I was a teenager about how much he loved himself.

How much he was steeped in sin because he couldn't control his lust and his desires. But if you remember, he performed all these miraculous feats of great strength, heroic exploits that many of our Sunday school children know by heart.

But, as I said, Samson fell into sin. He succumbed to lust and to pride. He foolishly divulged the secret of his strength which was his long hair.

Ultimately, though, it was not his hair cut that cost him his strength, what cost him his strength was that he broke his vow to God.

When the Philistines attacked him again, remember, scripture tells us that he was easily captured. Verse 20-21, chapter 16, he did not know, it says, because he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

[25 : 52] Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, they brought him down to Gaza and they bound him with brawn chains and he was a grinder in the prison.

This is a sobering statement that Samson didn't even know. He didn't even realize that the Spirit of God had departed from him.

Why? Because sin spiritually blinds us. Doesn't it? It makes us a prisoner. prisoner. Like Samson had his eyes gouged out.

Like he became a prisoner who was forced to slave in the grinding mill for the rest of his life. That was, though, until he repented and the Lord used him one last time to deliver a great victory over his enemies.

Remember, when he was chained up and he repents and his strength returns and he pulls those pillars down and everybody else who was celebrating to their pagan gods were crushed as well.

[26:58] I've heard it said recently, Samson, now, I'm going off on a rabbit trail, but this has just bothered me because Samson was a messed up man and we're all messed up people.

That's why it's so encouraging to read the Bible because it's like, man, I'm just as messed up as they are. In fact, sometimes they're a lot more messed up than me and that makes me feel better though I know I'm still very messed up, you know what I'm saying? But Samson, there's this kind of, I've heard people talk about how he was so depressed, the Spirit of God left him, never returned to him and so he committed suicide as the last act of his life.

It's like, no, read Hebrews chapter 13 and he's mentioned in the hall of fame of faith, you know? So, we've got to help Samson out sometimes.

Not that he needs it from me. But, Sardis, like Samson had once been powerful, but as they began like Samson to tolerate sin, they became weak and blind and unaware of the fact that the Spirit of God had completely departed from their congregation.

And, as we've mentioned, many churches fearfully, unfortunately, are in the same situation today. They look alive, but inside, that congregation is blind.

[28:15] They're bound in the chains of their own sin. In churches like that, Christ says that you have my name, that you may look alive, people might think you're alive, but the truth is, I know that you're dead.

Then we see in verses 2 and 3 that Christ commands them to wake up. 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. Remember then what you received and heard. Keep it and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come against you. So, apparently, there are some in the church in Sardis who were truly saved.

And the Lord calls these faithful few to rescue this dying church from the death spiral that they are in. The Lord is prompting these faithful few to reform and to restore their church.

The first command from him was simply this, to wake up. This was not a time, he says, to be lethargic. This was a call to action. They needed to assess the situation of their church and to not be passive and accepting what was going on there.

[29:37] Their church was dying. Much of it had already died. It was time for them to wake up and to get to work. His second command was to strengthen what remains and is about to die.

This was a call to rescue what they could from that dying church. Any embers that still existed were to be fanned by them into flame.

In verse 3, Christ commanded them to remember what you had received and heard. So by this point in the New Testament period, canon was closing.

The canon was closing or had closed. All the gospels and all the epistles had been written. Again, Revelation is being completed here. We know Paul's letters were in circulation by this time, going to the different churches.

Certainly others were also in circulation as well by this time. And so the Lord is telling these faithful believers in Sardis to think back on the spiritual truth that they had received, that they had heard, and to not let their hearts grow cold to His word.

[30:48] The believers in Sardis had to recover their love for the word of God. And in doing so, they needed to follow Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6.

20. There, the apostle says, O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.

But, as we see from Christ's commands, that it's not merely enough to remember the truth. He also says that they must keep it.

Not just remember it, but they must keep it. Like we saw in the church at Pergamum, it's not enough to know the truth. The Lord commands us to obey it as well.

Finally, the Lord commanded them to repent in verse 3. So, on top of everything else, those in the church at Sardis needed to confess their sins and turn from them. Without repentance, none of the other changes would have a lasting difference in the life of the church.

[31:57] They had to break the patterns of sinfulness. They had to come into right relationship with God if there was going to be revival, if there was going to be reformation, if there was going to be restoration.

The Lord warned them what would happen if they failed to obey His command. In verse 3, He says, if you will not wake up, I will come like a thief.

You will not know at what hour I will come. He's coming against you. He says in verse 3. So when the Lord speaks of coming like a thief, it's a picture of His imminent judgment.

At any moment, it could come. It means He's coming to them without warning. In fact, this is the warning. They're not going to receive any others. When they least expect it, He will come.

Later in Revelation 16, verse 15, we read, Behold, our Lord says, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed.

[33:05] In his second epistle, Peter warns in chapter 3, verse 10, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed.

That's a warning of God's final judgment on the world. Though Christ's words to Sardis here are specific to them, if the church doesn't repent and reform, he will come at an unknown time, and he will remove their lampstand.

And this is the same threat that is issued towards dead churches and dying churches today. If they will not wake up from their spiritual slumber and be strengthened with love for God and for His word and remember His truth and live obediently to Him and repent of their sins, then the only thing left for them is to face the horror and terror that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 5, 2, and 3, where there he says, For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night while people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

We next see that Christ encourages the faithful few in verse 4. He says, Yet you still have a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

So the Lord begins to close His letter to Sardis with an encouragement to that small group of believers. We don't know how many it was, more than one, two, three, maybe a handful or more, but certainly it was the vast minority of that church, but He closes with a faithful word of encouragement to them.

[35:21] In the midst of their dead church, there was a little flicker of hope. There were some roses among the thorns.

The Lord had a remnant of believers in His church in Sardis. In Romans 11, 1-5, Paul reminds his readers that God will always have a remnant of His people, Israel, no matter how dire and spiritually dead the nation may appear.

Romans 11, 1-5 says, I ask then, has God rejected His people? By no means, for I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah? How he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets.

They have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life. But what is God's reply to him? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

[36:30] So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace. Evidently, the number of faithful believers in Sardis was very small, as we had mentioned.

Small enough though to be able to be used by the Lord to have a huge impact on this church that was dying, who He says was in fact dead.

But, though they were small, we see that the Lord had not forgotten them. Isn't that nice to know? That even when you're surrounded by unbelievers in unbelief that the Lord does not forget those who are faithful to Him.

Hebrews 6.10 says, therefore, God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints as you still do.

So then He talks about them having garments that have not been spoiled. What does this mean? Well, that word soiled in the Greek means stained or dyed.

[37:42] In Scripture, we see that garments are often used to refer to the spiritual character of a person. In Jude 23, for example, it describes the spiritual contamination of people corrupted by false teachers.

It says that their garments are stained by the flesh. The unsoiled garments of these faithful few represented their godly character and their purity, which is remarkable when you consider how corrupt this church was.

But there were still those in the church whom the Lord had kept. And Christ tells them, walk with Him in white, for He says, you are worthy.

White robes, like the ones that are described here, were commonly worn during this time period at celebrations and festivals during the times of military, great military victories, even pagans, primarily they would be the ones who would do this.

They would even come to their own worship services or ceremonies to their false gods, and they themselves would wear these white clean robes as a symbol of their goodness, of their own goodness and their own affection.

[39:00] But these robes that Christ describes aren't merely clean robes to wear in this temporal world. They are in reference to the bright, gleaming, spiritual robes of imputed righteousness that cover believers who have been purified by His sacrifice on their behalf.

In Revelation chapter 7 14, we read of those who it says there have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

This is the glorious truth of the gospel. In Romans 5 19, it says, for as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Just as we were made sinners through Adam's sin, we have been made righteous by Christ's death. How? 2 Corinthians 5 19, for our sake, he made him who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So on the cross, God treated Christ as if he had lived our life of sin, so that he could treat us as if we've lived his life of righteousness.

[40:21] A new creation in Christ, then we are cloaked in his righteousness now and forever. And when God looks at us, even now, he sees only the holy perfection of his son.

That's good news. The imagery of spoiled garments is a thread again that runs through scripture because we are fallen creatures, because we are hopelessly, I should say, defiled by sin.

Even our righteous deeds do not cover up our sin. Isaiah 6, 4, and 6, read that this morning, I believe. We all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous needs are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquity like the wind takes us away. The very best things that we do are still tainted by sin.

Thus, anyone who expects to stand before God clothed in their own righteousness, of their own good deeds, of their own good works, anyone who trusts in their own righteousness is trusting in a polluted garment.

[41:37] The stains are there. God demands perfect righteousness. Remember what Jesus said? Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

How high is this standard? Well, he says in verse 48, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Now, that seems to be an unattainable standard. But Christ provides a perfect righteousness by imputation for all who truly trust in him as Lord and Savior.

God imputes righteousness to believers apart from any works that they do. The righteousness of Christ covers them like a gleaming white spotless garment of absolute perfection.

In the words of Isaiah 61 10, it says there, I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. My soul will exult in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation.

[42:55] He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness. That's what the Apostle Paul meant when he testified that he had come to be by faith.

He said in Philippians 3, 9, that he was found in Christ, not having righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

The righteousness that comes from God. And it's on the basis of faith. One day when we go to be with Christ or when he returns to take us from this world, our glorification will be instant. It will be complete. 1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not yet appeared as yet what we will be.

We know that when he appears we will be like him because we will see him just as he is. These are the robes John describes the church wearing at the marriage supper of the lamb in Revelation 19:7 and 8 let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to him for the marriage of the lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen bright and clean for the fine linen is bright and clean for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints so in the midst of this really difficult situation imagine that you you're in that church and you know that it's dying and you see what's going on and Christ has a message of encouragement don't give up don't stop fighting for your church he is capable to take a faithful few and do tremendous and great things through them fifthly we see that

[44:57] Christ promises that believers who persevere to the end will be clothed in his righteousness and will one day be made righteous we've kind of already talked about this but verse five says 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 he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches so here our Lord's theme goes now to his wider audience to those who will read and hear this letter that includes you and I he promises that all faithful believers who persevere to the end will be clothed in his righteousness and they will one day be made righteous there are no caveats there are no conditions here this is Christ's promise to the one who overcomes and remains faithful to him that's important to remember because some have misconstrued the rest of his statement the

Lord says I will never blot his name out of the book of life I will confess his name before my father and before his angels although Christ promises not to erase the names of his people some take it to mean that it could happen turning God's promise here into a veiled threat however God does not add nor does he subtract from his book of life those names that are written have been there for eternity and will remain there in John's vision of the future great white throne judgment we see the end result of Christ's promise to keep our name secure Revelation 20 verses 11 through 15 then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it from his presence imagine close your eyes if you want and imagine this from his presence earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them and

I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were open then another book was open which is the book of life and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done and the sea gave up the dead who were in it death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged each one of them according to what they had done then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire this is the second death the lake of fire and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire Christ promises us who are saved that our salvation is secure that our name is recorded in his book and we will not enter into that terrible place there is no greater blessing than the assurance of our salvation and the assurance of an eternity with our

Savior Christ letter to the dead church at Sardis is full of rich hope for his saints he promises us that he will clothe us in white robes of eternal life that he will never erase our names out of his book of life and that not only that but that he himself will personally confess our names before his father and to the rest of the hosts of heaven those promises extend to all believers the Lord's letter to Sardis ends with his familiar charge to the rest of the church in verse 6 he says he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches so for the believers listening there was wonderful news to behold here and here's the thing you know what happened to Sardis they received the message at least for a time at least for a while in fact

I think there's still churches in Sardis aren't there today this very day very small yeah but potentially still there today so history tells us that there was a second century apologist named Melito some say he wrote the first commentary interesting on the book of revelation isn't God interesting in how he works he served as the bishop of Sardis which gives us reason to believe that revival took place in this dead church that those believers did wake up that they did remember the truth they had received!

[50:11] That they did repent that they did encourage the rest of their church to get with it and to repent and we can pray that the Lord will do the same for the churches that we know that we're concerned are being in a dead and dying situation because let's be honest sometimes we see a church struggling and dying and a little part of us is happy to hear about it if we're honest unfortunately shouldn't be the case we think oh I know some people there I know some of that history there and you know what good riddance but may we never think like that may we never hope for that for any church and may we instead hope and pray that for those churches that we're concerned about those churches that are going through difficult times those churches that are dwindling and dying may we be praying for them that revival and restoration would take place in their congregations melodies

Thank you.