

Letter to Sardis Revelation 3:1-6

The city of Sardis - *SAHR diss* is about 30 miles to the east of Thyatira - *thigh uh TIGH ruh*. There were five highways that intersected in this city of great influence. It was once the capital of the Lydian kingdom, which boasted of the incredibly rich King Croesus (*KREE-səs*).



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To the Church in Sardis

3 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

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

⁴Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ⁶ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The words of Christ are extremely stern to this church.

- I. **The Completeness** of God v. 1
 - A. Seven Spirits v.1
 - B. Knowledge (*oida*) v.1 (*Complete understanding*)
- II. **The Controlling Thief** v.3
 - A. Comes when Least Expected
 - B. An illustration revealing the history of Sardis

Twice this heavily fortified city was completely surprised and humiliated by military defeats (549 BC & 218 BC). On both occasions the city was taken by surprise in a nighttime attack by soldiers who quietly scaled the steep fortress walls. Thus, the warning to be on watch — WAKE UP

Wake up — v.2 — **Present** tense, Imperative mood (the action must absolutely take place today) to be awake, to watch; to be alive.

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In the second half of the first century, Sardis was once again prosperous, primarily because of its trade and its wool-dyeing industry. Modern archeologists have found very significant ruins at Sardis, including the remains of a second & third-century Jewish synagogue, as well as evidences of early Christian and also gnostic symbols. These include a picture of the evangelist John.

III. The Confessing Saints

A. The Blotting Out of Our Names

The Right to write names in the Book Belong to Christ — The Right to Blot Out belongs to Christ.

B. They Needed to Confess

There was a need to confess — to repent — they were dead!

A disquieting theological element in this warning has to do with the question of the security of believers in their relationship with God. The unrepentant person is under threat of having Christ “**blot out the name of that person from the book of life.**” The image of the book and the names first appears in the warning made: “**The Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.”** (Exod. 32:33, NIV). That very sentence is now used in this letter to the Christians at Sardis. What is clear in this text is that God's gift of salvation is received and heard, and it is kept by the faith of repentance (3:3). It is, therefore, theologically irresponsible to theorize about a doctrine of grace that keeps our names in the great Book of Life against our will. This text is a freedom text. The letter to Sardis in no way diminishes the authority and saving power of Jesus Christ on one side, nor on the other side will this text allow the self-serving “**easy-street**” doctrines of general grace to reduce redemption into a general truth like the physical law of gravity.

The judgment of this passage is not directed against the wealthy and corrupt city of Sardis, but against the Lord's colony within Sardis. Could there be Confession for the Church — Repentance for the Redeemed? (II Chronicles 7.14)

There is a continual biblical balance between the all-sufficiency of the forgiveness of Jesus and the vital importance of our repentance.

Repentance must be a present reality! It is not a transaction that was once undertaken, it is a lifestyle. Our salvation is a daily, living, dynamic relationship.

C. The Wearing of White Robes

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There is a garden-variety commonness about repentance too. This may be the importance of, “**dressed in white**” (3:5) as the image for the repentant Christians.

1. Common Cloth
2. Pure Cloth

White is the color for purity, but also it is the color a slave would wear who could not afford the luxurious and colorful dyed woolens of Sardis. To a city famous for its colors, how common and peasant-like is this promise that the mark of the disciples of Christ is the clothing and color of the poorest, not the gorgeous shades of the rich.

NOTE: The Lord of the church does not belong to the church as its possession but as its possessor. God is the One who preserves our freedom, and He preserves his own freedom as well. He cannot be brought under the control of the church. This means that we Christians have a restraint, a good and healthy boundary within the theological mandate. Our task is to trust on a day-to-day basis in His faithfulness and to rejoice gratefully in His surprise. Jesus is the surprise that steadies everything (Col 1).

The Christian never moves or advances beyond the need for forgiveness and, in fact, the vigilance that this letter demands is precisely that vigilance of remembering that every Christian must live a life of daily relationship and of daily forgiveness and of daily joy. Then we may welcome the Holy thief.

The city continued its decline until its capture and destruction in 1402.

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C.S. Lewis

“When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less.”

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

“Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with ever fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity