

## ~REVELATION~

## Lesson 13- The Letter to Sardis (part 2)

Today we are continuing our study of the letter to Sardis and in this letter, Jesus is warning His Church of the deceptions of pride, complacency, and dead orthodoxy that can creep into the church. Last week we covered the first three verses of this letter, and today we will finish the remainder and take a deep look at the amazing promises to the overcomer. By way of review, let's read this letter again, **Revelation 3:1-6**.

Jesus is giving the Church some serious warnings. This church had progressed into a state of spiritual decay as they were slowly being lulled to sleep by the enemy. Jesus says in **verse 1**, **you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead**. They fell into a state of spiritual slumber and what's worse... this church had no idea they were in a state of death and spiritual rot. Their overconfidence had brought them into a state of complacency. They thought they had a name that they were alive, but they were really dead; dead in religious orthodoxy and tradition; dead in pride and arrogance. But Jesus in His mercy gives us the remedy in **verses 2-3**... He tells us to WAKE UP! Look to Me; strengthen yourselves; read your Bible; remember how you have received and heard the Gospel; hold fast and repent. Because you're about to completely die away into a state of apostasy. Then Jesus says... if you will not watch... I will come upon you... the Day of the Lord will come upon you as a thief.

We spent the last half of the class talking about the purpose of the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. It is a time when Righteous Wrath is coming on the whole earth. *Isaiah 13:9- Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.* This Day is not meant for Christians. In fact, Amos says, *Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light.* *Amos 5:18.* This Day is not meant for Christians so God in His mercy He has prepared a means of escape from this Great and Terrible Day of God's Righteous Wrath. This means of escape is Jesus when He catches us away to be with Him. Just as Noah was given provision to escape the wrath of the flood by entering the ark, Matt 24:36-47, so also Jesus is giving a means of escape for those who are watching and ready and have their lamps filled with oil, Matt 25:1-13 "Ten Virgins Parable." Jesus is telling us to watch and be ready for Him. Notice what Jesus says in *Luke 21:34-36-34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape* ἐκφεύγω (to flee out from) *all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

This brings us to verse 4. Jesus always has His remnant, those who are in Jesus and counted worthy because of their faithfulness.

**3:4) 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.**

I love those last words of verse 4... **for they are worthy**. Just as Jesus said in Luke 21:35... counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. We are found worthy because Jesus is worthy, and we are made one in Him because of our faithfulness in Him. This is when we are glorified together in Him at the Resurrection, **Luke 20:35-36; Phil 3:8-14, 20-21**. We are counted worthy because we have remained faithful to Jesus. He is coming back for a faithful Bride, one who has not defiled their garments with the stains of the world.

There were a few faithful saints in Sardis who had not allowed this decay to defile their soul. They had not allowed the slow decay of Apostasy to creep in and they were watchful. Jesus says they **have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white**. The white garment is the symbol of Holiness; a symbol of our Salvation in Jesus. Our Righteousness is as filthy rags, Isaiah 64:6, but the Righteousness of God is pure white, white and clean and holy without spot. But these white robes are not just merely

symbolizing our Righteousness, these robes become a symbol of our place and status in the Kingdom of God.

Notice the promise to the overcomer in the next verse...

**PROMISE TO THE OVERCOMER: 3:5** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

This phrase “white garments” is ἱματίοις λευκοῖς. The ἱμάτιον is an upper garment or the fine apparel of a king, John 19:2; Rev 19:13, 16; 1 Pet 3:3; Matt 26:65; 27:35; 1 Sam 19:24; 2 Sam 1:11; 13:31; 2 Kings 5:7; 6:30; 19:1; 22:11.

Isaiah prophesied of this kingly ἱμάτιον garment in *Isaiah 61:10- I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, ἱμάτιον σωτηρίου, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

This is the promise to the overcomer. All through the book of Revelation we see believers depicted as wearing white robes. But there is something very interesting about these robes that you can only see in the Greek. Here in Revelation 3:5 we see the promise of the white robe promised to faithful believers, and then the first mention of Christians actually wearing these robes is in chapter 4 with the 24 elders, *Revelation 4:4- Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes, ἱματίοις λευκοῖς; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.* The 24 elders represent a distinct group of Christians known as the Bride of Christ; the faithful saints who were raptured. These are faithful Christians who were watching and were counted worthy of the Resurrection and counted worthy to escape the things that will come upon the earth, Luke 21:36; Rev 3:10. Here in Rev 4:4 we see several things that set the 24 Elders apart from other Christians: they are seated on thrones, which means they have their glorified bodies; they are wearing stephanos victors crowns that are only promised to the overcomer; and they are clothed in white robes, ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, the same term used in Revelation 3:5.

As we read through the book of Revelation, there are many Christians who die for the sake of Jesus. These are the Tribulation Martyrs, and they are also depicted as wearing white robes. Our English translation says these are “white robes,” and we might assume they are the same robes as the 24 Elders. But in the original Greek we discover they are different. This robe that the Tribulation Martyrs are wearing is a στολή robe.

*Revelation 6:11- Then a white robe, στολαὶ λευκαὶ, was given to each of them...*

*Revelation 7:9- After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, στολὰς λευκάς...*

*Revelation 7:13-14-<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, τὰς στολὰς τὰς λευκάς, and where did they come from?”<sup>14</sup> And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes, στολὰς, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

This is very interesting, because these are not the same robes promised in Rev 3:5, ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, and they are not the same robes that the 24 Elders are wearing. This robe that the Tribulation Martyrs are wearing is a στολή- is an honorable long flowing robe. In Scripture this robe is a holy garment to depict holiness and purity, such as Aaron’ robe, Ex 28:2; Lev 6:11; 16:24. But something else that is fascinating is this also happens to be the type of the robe given to the prodigal son, Luke 15:22. Which is very interesting because these Tribulation Martyrs are in a sense like the prodigal son. They had sought the pleasures of the world for a time, but then finally woke up and came to the Father. And when they did, they were clothed in long flowing honorable robe. But it is different than the kingly type of robe given to the 24 Elders who were faithful and watchful until the end and didn’t play the harlot with the world.

There is one more piece of white linen that is described in the book of Revelation that is given to the faithful Bride. Near the end of the 7-year Tribulation, just before Jesus returns, we see the marriage supper

of the Lamb take place and the Bride is making herself ready for Jesus, **Revelation 19:7-8**. This word fine linen is βύσσινος. It is the absolute finest apparel. Joseph was clothed with this fine linen apparel when he became 2<sup>nd</sup> in command to Pharaoh in Egypt, Gen 41:42. Mordecai was dressed in this royal apparel of fine linen by the king of Persia, Esther 8:15. It is the clothing Jesus was wearing when He appeared to Daniel, Daniel 10:5. This βύσσινος, fine linen is the absolute finest apparel. We might liken it to a wedding dress. The royal wedding dress of the Bride of the King of the Universe. This is what the Bride of Christ is adorned with. And notice that this fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. These righteous acts are not “good works,” but our faithful heart toward Jesus. They have to do with our choices in this life. This is the Christian who is found worthy of Eternal Life with Eternal Glory as His Bride.

This amazing promise of being given this white robe is then followed with the sure promise that He **will not blot out his name from the Book of Life**. The Lamb’s Book of Life is the Divine Record of those who believe in Jesus and sealed by His blood. This is not a book with a list of all your “good works.” It is a list of names of those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation, Rev 20:12-15; 21:27; 22:19; Daniel 12:1; Phil 4:3. Jesus says **I WILL NOT blot out his name from the Book of Life**. But, in line with this thinking, does this mean that those who **do not overcome**, He **WILL** blot out their name from the Book? These are hard sayings, however we need to clarify who is the overcomer, because some might ask, “If I sin, will my name be blotted out?” The short answer is NO! No one can lose their salvation, and in the same way no one can have their salvation taken away, Romans 8:38-39. Our salvation is eternally secure in Christ, John 10:28-29. And this is absolutely true, so long as you remain **IN CHRIST**, Ephesians 1. However, I do believe that one can reject their salvation and refuse to be in Christ, Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-29. Many of the Christians in Sardis were close to dying spiritually, being eternally separated from the Father. They had a name that was dead. This is apostasy and apostasy is the sin that leads to death, 1 John 5:16. It is a rejection of Jesus Christ. This is a heavy subject and why the New Testament writers, including Jesus, are constantly encouraging us to hold fast and endure until the end, Matt 24:13; Rev 2:10; 2:13; 2:25; 3:10-11.

It seems there are three types of people the Bible mentions concerning the Book of Life.

- 1) Those whose names are in the Book of Life, Rev 3:5; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 21:27; Is 4:2-3.
- 2) Those who have never had their name written in the Book, Rev 13:8; 17:8; Rev 20:15.
- 3) Those who have their names blotted out from the Book, Ex 32:32; Ps 69:28. But to have your name blotted out, must mean at one time your name was written in it. This is the warning Jesus is giving the church of Sardis. The warning of apostasy and becoming spiritually dead and falling away from Jesus.

But those who do choose Jesus and remain watchful, He promises to confess before the Father and before His angels. Notice the promise at the end of verse 5...

**3:5) ...I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**

Jesus is our High Priest and He ever lives to make intercession for us, Heb 7:25. When we confess Jesus as our Savior, Jesus confesses us to the Father, Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8; 1 John 2:23.

**KEY PHRASE: 3:6) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He is the Spirit that gives Resurrection Life to all who believe in Jesus, Romans 8:11. Many of the Christians in Sardis were gradually dying by letting the Word slip away. They were falling into a state of spiritual decay and apostasy. But those who hear what the Spirit says to the churches will find Resurrection Life.

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- 1) **The Local application in the 1<sup>st</sup> century:** Sardis was an actual church that had fallen into a state of complacency and had fallen into a state of spiritual slumber leading to death.
  - 2) **The Whole Church application:** Test your church if they are steeped in Christian orthodoxy and tradition

and stifling the Spirit. They might have a famous name in the world that seems like they are alive, but in God's eyes they might be dead.

3) **Personal application:** Be Watchful and look to Jesus! Keep your lamps full of oil and burning bright.

4) **Prophetic application: History of the Church and the Bible:** 1516 – 1730 “The Reformation Church”

For over 1,200 years (313 – 1516), the Catholic Church had been stifling the Spirit. The Papal Church had been slowly lulling the Church to sleep with their useless traditions to the point that they made the Word of God illegal to be read by the common person. This ushered in the Dark Ages, when the Church fell into a deep slumber and the Light was going out. But remember, Jesus gave us the remedy... The Word of Life. He says WATCH! and... **Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.** The power of the Word will revive you and awaken you back to Life. And that is exactly what happened in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1516 the Light of the Gospel came into the world when Erasmus printed his 1516 Greek NT and allowed the New Testament to be given in its original language. This gave rise to faithful men such as Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Ulrich Zwingli, Miles Coverdale, John Rogers, and Robert Stephanus which then led to the King James Bible being printed in 1611.

1516 Erasmus 1 <sup>st</sup> Greek NT	1535 Coverdale Bible: 1 <sup>st</sup> Complete Bible in English
1517 Martin Luther and his 95 Thesis	1537 John Rogers: Matthews Bible (included Tyndale OT translation)
1522 Luther (and Melanchthon)- 1 <sup>st</sup> German NT	1550 Stephanus Greek NT: The Royal Edition of the Textus Receptus
1526 Tyndale- 1 <sup>st</sup> English NT	1560 Geneva Bible with John Calvin's notes (the Bible the Pilgrims 1620)
1531 Zwingli Zurich Bible- 1 <sup>st</sup> Bible in Swiss	1611 King James Bible (the pinnacle of our English Bible until 1881)

The Reformation from the Catholic Church was truly the work of God bringing His Light into the dark world, however as the decades progressed, the corruption of men crept into the Church. And again, religion and the traditions of men stifled the Spirit. Just as Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*Your*

*traditions have made the Word of God of no effect.*” Mark 7:13. The Church fell into a state of complacency. Content in their own traditions and names they had given themselves. Giving Truth to Jesus's words... You call yourselves a Calvinist, Arminian, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal... “You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” The Reformation was the work of God to bring the Light of the Word and the freedom of Truth into the hands of believers, but out from the freedom of Protestantism came many factions and divisions within the Church. Just as Paul warned the Corinthians... *1 Corinthians 3:3-4, 21- 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? 21Therefore, let no one boast in men.*

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Don't boast in the traditions of men, but rather take heed to Jesus' words...

*Be Watchful! Be found in Him.*

*Be Ready...*