

Revelation #9

August 28, 2022

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Behold I Am Coming Soon

The message today is from Revelation 3:1-6: The Church in Sardis

A key principle application: Unchallenged pride and complacency will result in the decline, defeat, and even death of a once thriving church, Christian ministry or personal testimony.

We see it all the time, and you've probably all felt the embarrassment when success is a sure bet; there is no way you can lose— and then you lose.

That seemed to be the case with the Colts at the end of the season last year. Win one of the last two games and they were going to the playoffs. But, they lost...even to Jacksonville— the team with the worst record. If you were going to pick a team to play for an easy win Jacksonville was it.

Then, there is Napoleon's Waterloo! Napoleon arguably fielded the most powerful military force in the world at the time. Historians have detailed Napoleon's failure to win a certain victory over the Duke of Wellington with savage candor, citing Napoleon's overconfidence and underestimate of Wellington's leadership and soldiers and even his Prussian allies. Napoleon is quoted as saying that the battle would be "a lunchtime affair." Napoleon's Waterloo is synonymous with failure and defeat.

"If anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." —Galatians 6:3

We are reminded in Proverbs of the dangers of unchallenged pride and complacency. Proverbs 6:10-11 calls out to us boldly warning the complacent fellow, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an unarmed man."

Jesus told them a parable saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God says to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

"Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." —I Corinthians 10:12

Have you ever heard of the *Digital Equipment Corporation*? Neither have I. *DEC* was second only to IBM. The founder, Ken Olsen argues for context, but his statement loomed large in the company's demise. In 1977 he said, "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home." This was their Waterloo!

These examples illustrate unchallenged pride and complacency. And, in each of these case studies there was a false sense of reality! And so it was for the church in Sardis.

I. History: The city and situation in Sardis

A. Once was the ancient capital of the region of Lydia

B. Known for its wealth from textiles, dyeing of cloth and fine jewelry.

C. Religion

1. They worshiped in the temple of Artemis

a) The temple was huge.

(1) 160' x 300'

(2) 78 columns each 56' tall!

2. The citizens worshiped the patron deity Cybele

a) Cybele was believed to possess the power of restoring the dead to life.

(Robert Mounce, "The Book of Revelation", p109)

b) A patron deity: a guardian deity; Very personal; instructor; source of spiritual growth; and as noted, has the power to restore the dead.

c) Sardis was known for the hot springs just outside the city. These hot springs were hailed as the very spot where Cybele would manifest power to give life to the dead.

(1) Pay attention to the notes below on Rev. 3:1

D. When John scribed the Revelation, Sardis was still living in the twilight of her rich, luxurious life.

1. At one point, King Croesus of Sardis had what historians call, *unlimited wealth*.

2. Yet this very king led the "Lydian empire into "defeat and decline."

E. The surprising/ not so-surprising fall of the Lydian empire

1. Sardis was a "mountain fortress"

a) Even after the writing of the Revelation, to capture Sardis was considered to be an impossibility.

2. Sardis fell to surrender numerous times and for the same reason

a) Surrendered to Alexander the Great without resistance

b) Surrendered to Antiochus III in 214 B.C. "through negligence of the defenders."

3. Sardis was situated on top of steep slopes composed of fractured rock full of cracks and faults. It was these very cracks and faults that would give the diligent and determined soldier a great advantage in attacking the city on the hill.

a) When the soldier reached the top they would find the battlements unguarded!

- b) The citizens considered themselves too safe to station a guard.
 - 4. Two times, back to back, complacency led to the capture of Sardis
 - a) Unchallenged pride and complacency led Sardis into defeat and decline.
- F. Application: The sin of pride and complacency was the downfall of the people of the city of Sardis. And, it spilled over into the attitude of the believers in the church.

1. Both the city and church had lost their vitality. (MacArthur)

II. (3:1-6) The Letter to the Church in Sardis

- A. (3:1a) To: The angel/ messenger of the church in Sardis
- B. (3:1b) From: Him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars¹
 - 1. The Lord Jesus is the Source of the seven spirits of God (The Holy Spirit)
 - a) The Holy Spirit comes from Father and sent by the Son
 - (1) John 15:26: Proceed from the Father and the Son
 - (2) John 16:7: Sent by the Son
 - 2. The work of the Spirit is that of bringing forth life out of that which is dead or lifeless;
 - a) like at Creation in **Genesis 1:2**;
 - b) and **new birth (John 3:3-8)**
 - c) And to produce “living water” flowing out of believers (John 7:37-39)
 - d) He is the Life-giving Spirit poured out on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33)
 - e) Romans 8:9-11 teaches us that the Spirit is our spiritual life
 - (1) You are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in you
 - (2) The Spirit living in us is our spiritual life (8:10)
 - (3) The Spirit animates believers (see Romans 8:11)
 - f) The Spirit joins believers to the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)
 - 3. The Lord Jesus **emphasizes the Life-giving Spirit** to this church because it is His assessment of this church is dead to some degree and that **only the Spirit** is His provided means for them to “strengthen what remains and is about to die.”.
 - a) Cybele is not the source of power in their restoration. Only as the Risen, Reigning and Ruling Lord Jesus gives the Spirit.
 - (1) If they had any remnant *trust* in their former patron deity it would explain why they were in dire straits.
 - 4. And He (the Risen, Reigning and Ruling Christ) holds the seven stars

¹ The following points in section “B” are drawn from Tony Garland’s commentary.

- a) The seven stars are the seven messengers/ pastors/elders (see Rev. 1:20)

5. Take away:

- a) The Lord Jesus doesn't present Himself as judge here to this Church. But He wisely reveals their great lack and great need, which is this:
 - (1) Devoid of the Spirit and ignoring the appointed pastor/ elder the church in Sardis is dead.

C. (3:1c) I know:

1. Your works

- a) Nothing hidden: Not the deeds and especially NOT THE MOTIVE
 - (1) See Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:17; 1 Cor. 4:5; Hebrews 4:13

D. (3:1c and 3:2b) Concern: "I know your works/ deeds. You have a reputation for being alive but you are dead... for I have not found your works complete in the sight of My God."

1. Their situation was so grave that the Lord Jesus skipped the commendation and immediately addressed their spiritual condition.
2. The REAL PROBLEMS facing this church, which our Lord pinpoints:
 - a) He pronounced it "dead"
 - (1) Where there is death there is decay
 - (2) A dead church that was populated by people who were inwardly decayed and unbelieving.
 - b) They had the appearance of being good "church folk" but because they were dead, nothing was alive even though it looked alive!
 - c) "For I have not found your works complete in the sight of My God."
 - (1) A haunting verse in Daniel 5:27 provides insight to the thoughts of the Righteous Judge who knows!: "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting."
 - (2) They had a fabulous reputation among the churches. Their deeds were obviously lauded by other churches. Maybe, they were the envy among the churches.
 - (a) But God found those very deeds *unacceptable*.

E. (3:4) The Commendation: "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."

1. A "few". But not enough for the Lord to change His judgment that they are dead.
2. But, take heart, you who are faithful and loyal to the Lord Jesus! He doesn't forget you!

- a) Hebrews 6:10 declares, “For God is not unjust. He will not forget/ overlook your work/ deeds and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”
 - b) Malachi 3:16-17: speaks of the Lord remembering all those who feared the Lord!
- F. (3:2a, 3) The Command and Counsel of the Lord: “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die...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 at what hour I will come against you.”
 - 1. He counsels them to immediately follow five steps to repentance. See application, point “D”.
- G. (3:5-6) His Promise: To the overcomer... Remember, overcomers are those people who have been born again!
 - 1. All true Christians are overcomers, and will be clothed in white robes at the great wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9). It is a **promise** to all believers meaning that Christ will clothe them in eternal purity and holiness. (MacArthur)
 - 2. “...will never blot out their names from the book of life! I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels!”
 - 3. “He who has ears to hear, let Him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”
 - a) Until the return of Christ it is never too late for a dying church to return to the path of spiritual revival.

III. Application

- A. The letter to the church in Sardis ends like the others. He exhorts His church to follow His counsel, commands, and to believe His promises.
 - 1. Those who, through pride and complacency, have been playing church, needed to wake up before it was too late to save the church.
 - 2. And, those **few** who are faithful and loyal to Christ can be comforted by the knowledge that their salvation is eternally secure.
- B. The Lord Jesus knows everything about you. He knows your spiritual condition: your apathy, your complacency, your falsehood or even your sincerity.
 - 1. Nothing is hidden from His sight. He knows if you are playing church.
 - 2. He has infallible knowledge concerning the reality of your spiritual condition. Repent if you know you’ve been playing church.
 - a) Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:17; **1 Corinthians 4:5**

- b) Hebrews 4:13: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.”
- C. New Birth, regeneration by the Spirit produces both practical godliness and a true vibrant spiritual life.
 - 1. Sound doctrine and orthodoxy means nothing if there is no love for Christ.
- D. Are you listless and feeling dead inside? Friend, while there is breath there is hope. Look at the 5 steps to renewal Jesus provides in Revelation 3:2a, and 3:
 - 1. “Wake up!” Cease the indifference and complacency. Confront sin and confess it.
 - 2. “Strengthen what remains.” There were still buried but warm embers of God’s grace. **Fan those embers into flame the spiritual realities that are theirs in Christ!**
 - a) 2 Timothy 1:6. Paul urged Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...”
 - 3. “Remember what you received and heard.” Go back to the foundational truths of God’s word, remembering the gospel and the teachings of the scripture. Reaffirm the truth about God, about Christ, about sin, salvation and holy living.
 - 4. “Keep it.” Having reaffirmed those truths of Scripture, keep them. Guard them. Hold unswervingly to them! Remember, having correct doctrine without obedience will not bring renewal to your spiritual life!
 - a) 2 Timothy 4:14: “Guard the good deposit with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”
 - 5. “Repent!” Turn away from the dead works. Doing the five steps will bring revival!
 - 6. But, friends, notice the **sober warning!**
 - a) To turn away from the command of the Lord would mean that Jesus would come suddenly in judgment. Not the second coming. But a coming in which He will sever the unrepentant person or the unrepentant church from His Name.

Principle application 1 : Unchallenged pride and complacency will result in the decline, defeat, and even death of a once thriving church, Christian ministry or personal testimony.

Principle application 2: If you are full of spiritual pride and complacency it is never too late to repent and experience spiritual renewal.

Principle application 3: Take heart faithful Christian. No matter how alone you feel at times in your love for the Lord, He never forgets you or the love you are showing Him. Your faithfulness will be greatly rewarded!