

Session 5: Sardis: Reputation Without Spiritual Substance

INTRODUCTION

We are in the middle of a series on Jesus' prophetic letters—His prophetic messages—to the seven churches of Asia in the book of Revelation. These messages were not only spoken to the church in that generation, but they were spoken to prepare the church for the unique events which would happen in the rest of the book of Revelation.

The reason the Lord spoke these words in Revelation 2-3 is that He understood the big picture, which in terms of the earthly, heavy events, unfold from chapter 6 all the way through to the end, to chapter 19. He gave the specific things the church will need to be able to be prepared for the great revival and the great trouble called the Tribulation that is coming. He gave these things, so that the church will be victorious and the church will operate in the power of God. He was speaking prophetically into the very issues that the church would need in that hour to be ready.

That is not in any way to minimize the value of what was in His heart for that church in that generation and also the church during 2000 years of church history. But we do not want to lose sight of the fact, that it was the church in the end times which, I believe, was mostly on His heart—a church in which there would be more people, more believers, than any time in history. As a matter of fact, there will be more people on the earth than all the believers added up in history. That is the generation Jesus was targeting when He gave this message to John to give to the leaders of the church of his day.

TO THE LEADER OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

He says in chapter 3:1: “To the angel . . .”—which means “messenger”. As we have covered in each of the sessions, it can be either a heavenly messenger, an angel, or an earthly messenger. It is the same word. I believe it is clearly an earthly messenger. He is talking to the apostolic leader of the church of Sardis. He says, “Go tell that leader this, or write and give him this message.”

The Lord introduces Himself, as He does in each of the seven letters, in a particular, specific way. He is challenging them uniquely in each church, in a way which would be necessary for them to enter in and be overcomers. There are two facets of His personality and His ministry which He highlights, because He knew this is what the church of Sardis would need: He presents Himself as the One who has the seven spirits of God and the One who has the seven stars in His hand.

A CHURCH WHICH USED TO BE ALIVE

The problem with the church of Sardis was they lacked the grace to follow through in terms of spiritual vigor at the heart level. They experienced revival. They tasted revival, they remembered revival, but they could not press in and follow through on this issue of holding fast to what they had in their early days, or of watching or cultivating a life in God.

He says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive.” (v.1). That was because of what had happened to them during the great revival that had broken out in Acts 19-20, when all of Asia heard the word of God. Sardis had been touched in a special way. They had a reputation throughout all of Asia for their spiritual vigor and vitality because, at one time, in the early days, it was true. But they were living on a memory of the past. It was not a false reputation, it was a true memory in that hour: some forty years earlier, they really were leaders in the revival. They were still alive, but a few generations can come and go and ministries can continue to live on the reputation of what happened a couple decades ago.

He says, “You have a name, you have a reputation that you are alive because you really were alive. But now you are dead. You are not laying hold of the grace to follow through, to break through at the heart level. I want you to, and I am here to help you and call you to follow through on this” (Rev. 3:1, paraphrased).

BE WATCHFUL AND REMEMBER

What He is calling them to is quite simple (Rev. 3:2, paraphrased), “Be watchful. Develop your prayer life. Develop your heart connect with God.” That is what being watchful means in one sentence. There are a few more details that I would add onto the idea of watchfulness, but that is what it means at its core meaning.

“And strengthen the things that were deposited in the old days when the revival broke out” (v.2, paraphrased). That was about forty years ago. “Strengthen the

things that were deposited in that season. These things are about to die. They used to be mighty and you were well known for them” (v.2, paraphrased). Jesus said, “I have not found your works perfect before God” (v.2). You can put the word complete or mature.

Verse 3: He calls them to remember, just like He did the church of Ephesus—these are the two churches. He says, “Remember what you have received from God” (v.3, paraphrased). He is talking about what they received in the great revival—the great outpouring of the Spirit that hit Ephesus and went to all of Asia. He told the church of Ephesus and Sardis the same thing, “Remember! Remember how you experienced Me back when the revival broke out and the way you were dedicated to Me. Hold fast! Hold fast to what we had yesterday, in the past, and repent. Line yourself up according to the way you used to live before Me” (v.3, paraphrased).

WARNING AND PROMISES

“Therefore if you will not watch . . .” (v.3), in other words, “If you will not develop this prayer life and this heart connect, I will come to your church as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. I am going to come suddenly and I am going to come unexpectedly. You are going to suffer loss when I come because, if I come and do not find you prepared, I will bring you into a season of correction” (v.3, paraphrased).

Verse 4. This is a correction for them. He says, “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” (v.4). The idea is, “You only have a few. You were at the very center of the revival some years ago and you only have a few who have been following through” (v.4, paraphrased). That is the idea. “Only a few of you have stayed steady. They have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white because they are worthy” (v.4, paraphrased).

Verse 5. Now He is going to give three promises to the overcomers. Number one: “He who overcomes, he shall be clothed in white garments.” Number two: “He who overcomes, I will not blot his name from the Book of Life.” Number three: “He who overcomes, I will confess his name before God and before the angels.”

HE WHO HAS AN EAR LET HIM HEAR

Then He gives an exhortation, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (v.6). In other words, “Pay close attention, because what I just told you has meaning, and you will not get it at a superficial reading” (v.6,

paraphrased). Jesus says this seven times in the book of Revelation. And He said seven times, “He who has an ear to hear . . .”, in the Gospels. Seven times in the Gospels and seven times in the book of Revelation. He is the only One who gave this teaching and He repeated it fourteen times.

It means, “Pay attention because what you are hearing has deeper meaning than what meets the eye, and you will not catch it at a superficial reading or a casual glance.” It also means, “It will take special help from the Holy Spirit to hear what I am saying, but you can understand it, if you pay attention. But you will need help.” Whenever the Lord says, “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear,” it means, “I will give you help to understand it, but you will have to be intentional about it. And you have to understand that you will not get it casually or on the run, or just through an occasional glance at this passage.”

THE KEY TO THE PROMISES

This is a passage we want to look at carefully. These three promises are not synonymous with being born again. A lot of commentators will say, when you read their commentaries, “These are promises that every born again person receives.” No, Jesus was not offering an empty promise. He was not offering a promise to them that they already had. He was offering all seven churches a promise if they would enter in—if they would press in and mature in the issues which He put before them.

The key to understanding the promises in the seven letters, is to understand what overcoming meant in the context of that letter. In this letter it meant watching, remembering, and holding fast to the values and the vision they had back in the early revival. He is not saying, “If you do that, you will be born again.” He says, “If you do that, I will give you a reward” (Rev. 3:5, paraphrased).

There is a special reward. They are already born again. This is not an empty promise. He is not promising that which they have anyway, whether they break through on the points, on which that He is exhorting and correcting them, or not. If they would die that day, the believers would have still gone to heaven, but they would not have broken through in those areas, that He called them to. Do not let anybody reduce these promises to that which every believer has automatically.

It is not an empty promise Jesus is offering them, with no real condition. If everybody is guaranteed this already, He is just mixing up His words. These

promises are meant to motivate us. We will see in a few moments that “he who has ears to hear”, means much more than just our general entrance into the city.

THE GREAT REVIVAL IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Roman Numeral I. The primary message. This church is known for its experiences during the past revival, and it is known for its past devotion. They had a reputation of being alive because they really were alive. They were one of the primary places which were touched. They had a special work of God, which happened when the great revival broke out. This was the most powerful revival in the book of Acts—Acts 19-20—where the Spirit of God broke out in Ephesus.

Acts 19:9-10 (paraphrased), “Paul reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus and he continued for two years and all who lived in Asia (Asia Minor), heard the Word of God.” The Word of God broke out in all of Asia Minor—which is modern day Turkey. It was a revival that far surpassed what happened in Jerusalem in Acts 2, or in Antioch in Acts 11, in terms of its numerical impact. This was the greatest revival in the New Testament. The church of Sardis was impacted in the wake of that revival. They were dynamically touched by it.

A WARNING

Notice what Paul says in Acts 20 when he is leaving the elders. He had been there for three years. Two years at the school, but a total of three years in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus is just down the way from Sardis. He told the elders in Acts 20: 28-31 (paraphrased): “Take heed to yourself. I know, by the spirit of prophesy, that some of you are going to get off course.”

He is talking to the eldership, the leadership of the church, of the mighty revival center of Ephesus. What a horrible prophecy. He is telling the shepherds, the leaders when he is leaving them, “I have been with you three years and this is what I know, ‘Thus says the Lord, after I depart, savage wolves will come in among you.’” (v.29, paraphrased). He says, verse 30 (paraphrased): “From among yourselves, men will rise up and speak perverse things. They will draw the disciples after themselves, after I leave in the years which will unfold.” They were all saying, “Not me Lord, not me.” He gave them, interestingly, the same exhortation that Jesus gave the church of Sardis which is the same area, all right there in Asia Minor.

THEREFORE WATCH

“Therefore watch. Develop your heart connect with God. Remember that for the three years I have been with you; I have faithfully spoken to you the Word of God. Remember what I have told you” (Acts 20:31, paraphrased). That is the very thing Jesus tells the church of Sardis, “Remember what you received” (Rev. 3:3, paraphrased). He would surely be including what Paul taught forty years ago. This was forty years ago, approximately.

Imagine the twenty year olds who were born during the revival. They are now sixty. They have seen a lot, but now they are spiritually dead and they are living in the memory of the fire of God in the past. I am not just talking about the fire of God in fiery meetings. I am talking about the way they encountered God at the heart level as individuals, the way they had a vibrant spirit. They had lost it.

You can have a vibrant spirit as an individual even if there is not a spirit of revival on your city. In Sardis and in all of Asia, they had a vibrant spirit as individuals and they had a revival spirit on the city as well and on the whole area.

NO PERSECUTION IN SARDIS

Paragraph B. They had no external enemies. The church of Sardis is unique in this regard. It is like Laodicea. Jesus commented on the persecution of several of the seven churches, but the church of Sardis did not have the external enemies that some of the other churches had. Even ten or twenty miles away in the ancient world was like being in another land. In the ancient world, some of the things happening in one city did not happen in the other.

This church did not have internal enemies either, like Pergamos and Thyatira, who had teachers publically promoting immorality. They had none of that. The problem which Sardis had was the same that Laodicea had. Their enemy was self-imposed. It was not internal, it was not the teachers. It was not external—the persecutors of the Roman Empire or of the people hostile to Christianity.

THEY FAILED TO PERSEVERE

They could not get a hold of their heart and follow through with God. It was a self-imposed enemy. They failed to remember. They failed to remember how powerfully Jesus had touched them back in the revival, when they were in their twenties. Now they were in their sixties. They failed to respond in the way they

did, when they first got converted. They failed to lay hold of the reality of how alive they really could be in their spirit.

He said, “I want you to remember how alive you were for a decade or two” (Rev. 3:3, paraphrased). Obviously for different ones it was different time frames. He said, “There are only a few of you who have held the course for forty years” (v.3, paraphrased). He is not saying, “Only a few of you will go to heaven when you die.” He is saying, “Only a few of you have stayed steady the whole time”. Only a few of them had not soiled their garments.

LIKE THE CHURCH IN THE WEST

What He says about the church in Sardis, like the one in Laodicea, is so applicable to the church in the West. It was really like “ouch” as I was preparing this. All of them have a big glorious “ouch”, like, “Yes, yes Lord, let’s do this.” But the church of Sardis and the church of Laodicea, later on in Revelation 3, are the two really clear descriptions of what is going on in the church in the Western world.

Roman Numeral II. Now Jesus introduces Himself in a very specific way as the One who has the seven spirits and the One who is holding the seven stars. Interestingly, that is the same introduction which He gave the church of Ephesus back in Revelation 2:1-7, “I am the one who holds the seven stars.” Of the seven churches He only told two of them, that He holds the seven stars. He told them both to remember how God had touched them back in the revival. Because I think that Sardis was parallel to Ephesus at the center of this revival. They had a unique leadership. That seems apparent to me. They were well known for being spiritually alive and for being powerful.

HE IS HOLDING THEM IN HIS HAND

Holding the seven stars—we find out, the seven stars are the leaders of the seven churches. When He says, “I am holding the seven stars,” He is saying, “I am holding your apostolic leader in my hand” (Rev. 3:1, paraphrased). That does not mean only the apostolic leader, but this is a type of the Lord’s commitment to the leadership in that church.

Why is it important that the leaders in the church know that the Lord would hold them in His hand, meaning, that the Lord desires to be near to them and dear to them? Because they are dear to Him. He has not given up on them, He is holding them in His hand.

As the leaders go in the Body of Christ, so the people go, as a rule. There are always some exceptions to that. There are always a few fiery guys who are going forwards, when the leaders are dead. There are always a few people who are dead, when the leaders are on fire. History tells us that the people live at the same level of spirituality as their leadership does. There is a dynamic connection between what they hear in the Word of God and the way they live. They choose the kind of people they want to hear. They chose the ones who touch the vision which is in their hearts. God knows that if the leaders are stirred up, the people will get stirred up as a rule.

Whether you are leading ten, one hundred, or one thousand, He is telling you, “I have you in my hand, I have not forgotten you, I have not let go of you. We are connected. I am with you. You have a future if you want it” (v.1, paraphrased). He tells this to Sardis and to Ephesus, two of the churches He told to wake up. The other one He told to wake up was Laodicea. He is saying, “I am holding you, I have not given up on you. There is still time. I am near you, I am connected to you, I want you connected to Me at the heart level. My hand is on you. I have not lifted my hand off you at all.”

JESUS’ REVELATION OF HIMSELF

Then He describes Himself as the One who has the seven spirits. This is an obvious reference to Isaiah 11, the famous passage on the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit—the seven facets of the Holy Spirit. It will take all seven facets of the Holy Spirit’s ministry for them to live and sustain a heart that is alive in the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus offers Himself as the one who holds the seven Spirits, it is as if He is saying, “I am giving you the Holy Spirit. You need all seven facets of this at the heart level for you to wake up spiritually and stay awake.” Some will hear this, move on and forget it. Beloved, to a church that is having a struggle to follow through, these seven Spirits are an essential answer. The fact that Jesus is holding the stars—the leaders—means that He has not given up on them, He has not let go of them, His hand is still on them. The hand of the Lord is still in their midst.

ALIVE IN NAME ONLY

He is going to give them a correction. He says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive and the reputation.” (v.1, paraphrased). Again, it was not

a false reputation, it is just a past reputation. They really were alive, they just are not now. They are living still in the after-glow of the revival which hit them forty years ago. It was not like the revival hit forty years ago and lifted. It continued for some time, nobody knows. For some lengthy season, there was a remarkable work of God breaking out in Asia.

I believe the Lord is going to return and visit the church in Turkey in a really special way. I believe there are special promises for the area of Turkey, which is the area of Sardis in the ancient world.

He says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (v.1). He did not say they were unsaved. That is not what He was talking about. He means, spiritually they are dull. He is not calling them hopeless hypocrites. He is saying, “Your heart is not moving.”

THE CHURCH IN THE WEST

Much of the church in the West is dead. That does not mean that they do not care about Jesus. The Word does not move their heart. Their heart is not moved in the place of prayer. They have a real struggle at the heart level, to connect with the Lord. The culture has inundated the church in the West and it is so normal to be dead. So many are dead. That does not mean that they are not born again, but they do not live with a conscious sense of inspiration through the Holy Spirit on a daily basis, or a near daily basis.

I do not want to lift the standard so high that nobody can live up to it. To be alive does not just mean they are born again. He is talking to a born again community. It is as if He says, “You are not living with a conscious sense of connection and inspiration as part of your lifestyle.” I do not mean every minute of every day. That is not what I am saying. It is within the reach of a believer to live with an ongoing, regular sense of inspiration at the heart level. That is what it means to be alive. Do not write this off.

OBEY ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT YOU HAVE

It is not like they are not born again and they are a cult group. No, they were at the center of the revival. He says, “I have not found your works perfect before God” (Rev. 3:2)—paragraph C. When He says that your works are not perfect before God, you think, “Well, that is a pretty high standard.” The word “perfect” would be “mature” or “complete”. What the Lord requires in Matthew 5:48—the Sermon

on the Mount—He requires you to be perfect, but you just have to define it the right way. He requires that you walk perfectly.

To walk perfectly, does not mean in the absolute sense, of never failing or never making a mistake. That is not what it is talking about. It is talking about setting your heart to obey all the light the Holy Spirit gives you in whatever season of life you are in. A new believer has a little bit of light, a little bit of understanding of what they are supposed to do. The Lord says, “I require you to try to obey the little that you have—all of it.” A mature believer has more light, but the standard is the same. The light is different. One has more light than the other, but the requirement from heaven is the same: to seek to obey, as far as you know, all that is in the will of God for that season.

The standard is the same for a brand new believer or for a mature apostle. Obey the light you have. Seek to obey it, seek to. Even mature apostles will still stumble, but they will seek to obey. It is the preoccupation of their life to obey that light. The measure of light is different, but the standard of what the Lord requires, in order to have a vibrant heart, is the same.

CONTENDING TO OBEY

There are so many who are so accustomed to grieving the Holy Spirit with their words, with their time, with the way they spend their money, or by disconnecting with the Holy Spirit through what they look at. They are so accustomed to it, that they cannot even feel any of the inspiration of that which Jesus is calling them to. He says, “I require that you live in the light which I give you and you are not. You are not walking perfectly. There are areas in which you are not contending to obey, like you know you are supposed to” (Rev. 3:2, paraphrased).

I tell you, the Lord has great mercy if you are contending and reaching to obey in every area. You may fall short, but you are reaching for it. You are pressing in. You are preoccupied to get a breakthrough in that area. I tell you, you are walking perfectly in the light you have, in the way in which the Lord means in this passage.

He gives His requirement to a believer who is one day old. They only know three things to do, but they have to go for them. They may fail, but they have to keep reaching for them. That is why new believers often have a more vibrant spirit than believers who are older. It is not because, “I had the fire and now I do not.” It is

because they were obeying all the light they had, and as they got older and had more light, they failed to continue to obey all the light they had.

FEELING ALIVE

Some look and say, “I remember when I was a new believer and I was so fiery.” That was because there was no area in your life in which you would be at peace just ignoring the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

I tell you, He cares about our words. He cares massively about what we do with our words, what we do with our time, what we do with our money, He really cares. The preacher may not care. He may let you off the hook, but the Holy Spirit does not. He wants us to live in a sense of inspiration, of feeling alive. I do not mean we are going to feel like we are in a bubble all day and everyday and never have a bad spot, but feeling inspiration should be the rule, not the exception. Feeling dead, moments and times of deadness, is meant to be the exception, not the rule of a believer’s life.

STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

The Lord is offering this to them. He is saying, “I want you to get a hold of this.” Roman Numeral V. He says, “I am going to tell you how to get a hold of it: be watchful, develop your heart—connect with the Lord. Strengthen the things that remain” (Rev. 3:2, paraphrased). In other words, the things that remain from the revival—the vision, the values, the mandates, the assignments—do not let them go. Strengthen them.

Let’s begin the process, because being watchful is a process. You do not just start with grieving and quenching the Spirit for ten years and then the next day, all of a sudden, you are feeling inspired. Developing a watchful spirit is a process. It takes time to strengthen the things that remain. When a person is physically sick, they do not take vitamins one day, and the next day they feel great. They work out one day and take vitamins. They might feel sick and sore if they overdo it.

REMEMBER AND HOLD FAST

He says, “I want you to remember. Remember the great revival. Remember how dedicated you were. Remember how I touched you. Remember how alive you were. I want you to remember the way you received from me initially” (Rev.3:3, paraphrased).

Then He is going to tell them the fourth thing, “Hold fast . . .” (v.3). In other words, it is going to take some “stick-to-it-ness”. It is going to take some follow through in the mundane. There is an element of the mundane in it. We must hold fast whether we feel it or not. That is what “hold fast” means. Hold fast does not mean: go with the flow. It is easy to go with the flow.

Hold fast means you are holding, when the wind is pushing you in the other direction. You are hanging on the pole so to speak. All the forces around you are pushing you away from that path. You are holding fast. You are not feeling the inspiration. Even a lot of people around you are not pressing in. The Lord says, “Do not worry about them. You hold fast. Keep doing the main and plain things that I have told you to do. Not the exotic things. The main and plain things: humility, time in the Word, faithfulness with your speech” (v.3, paraphrased).

We do not slander, we do not complain, we do not accuse. When we do, we repent. I do those things, but when I do them, I know it is not okay. I say, “Lord, I want the spirit of life on my spirit. I do not want to get crosswise with You. I know You are really nice. I know I am going to heaven anyway, but I want to feel Your presence. I want to feel alive.” He says, “You cannot just ramble off anything you want to say anytime you want to say it. I own you— your money, your sexuality, your speech, your schedule. You have to strive for all of it to be under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.”

We hold fast, we stay steady in humility and servanthood. We stay steady when nobody around us is appreciating it and it does not seem to be feeling that good or going that good. That is what holding fast means.

YOU NEED TO REPENT

The fifth thing: He says, “In order to do this, you need to repent” (v.3, paraphrased). You have to change your vision. To repent is not to just repent of an issue in your life. To repent means changing the big picture of what you are living for. What are you living for? “Well I am in the church and I want my ministry to be better, I would like a few more friends, a little more money, an easier time.” The Lord says, “Lift your vision higher. Lock into My heart and into eternity. Get a vision to be great before Me, and for Me to give you all that I have ordained for you in the age to come. Lock into something bigger than things being more comfortable right now, relationally, financially, or spiritually.

To repent means to change your mind. In this context, it means going higher than just having things a little easier physically, financially or spiritually. A lot of folks settle down if things get easier at that level. Jesus wants us to lock into having a vision for our life in the kingdom, which reaches into the age to come. That is why in all seven letters He gave them definitive promises, in which they were to anchor their heart for the age to come. He is going to give these to them right here in verse 5. He wants them to be anchored in those promises.

A WARNING

He says, “If you do not do it, I am going to come to you like a thief and you are not going to know the hour in which I am coming.”

Paragraph A, When Jesus comes like a thief, it is a proverbial expression. It means two things: He is coming unexpectedly, number one. Number two, you will suffer loss which could have been avoided. That is what this proverbial expression means. Five different authors in the New Testament—Jesus and four of the apostles—use the idea of the Lord coming as a thief.

He will come unexpectedly to many and they will suffer loss which could have been avoided. That is critical to the definition of a thief. Jesus is not the thief, the devil is—John 10:10. Jesus did not say, “I am a thief.” He said, “My coming will have the net result of a thief entering in and stealing your inheritance. It will not be because I took it from you, it is because I do not change, I require faithfulness, and when I come, if you are not faithful, you will be the one responsible for the loss. I am not the thief taking it from you. I am the holy God of love, I cannot change. When I come to inspect you, when I come near you, I demand agreement with My heart. If you do not, you are the one that caused the loss to take place” (Rev. 3:3, paraphrased).

Paragraph B. We can stop a thief, in the general sense. There is that one thief who will not be stopped, but I am talking about the general sense. You can stop a thief by the simplicity of watching. The guy is breaking into the neighborhood. I am not talking about the guy who is drug infested, demonized, and who cannot make sense of anything, coming through a brick wall.

I am talking about the general thief. He sees the light on, he sees the guy is in the house. So he goes to go to another house. It is just that simple. Jesus is saying that a thief is averted by the simplicity of paying attention. That is all it takes. Most

thieves in all of history will simply not go to the house, if they know the lights are on and people are there. It is that easy.

JESUS COMES TO US IN THREE WAYS

Paragraph C. Jesus is talking about coming to us. He comes to us in three ways. I do not have this in the notes. He comes to us at the second coming. We all know that. That is not what He is talking about here. He was not saying, “I will come to you suddenly at the second coming”—the eschatological second coming at the end of the age. That is not what He was talking about in this passage.

Secondly, He comes to us suddenly when we die physically. Most people do not know the day they are going to die. If they are not paying attention, they will suffer loss in the age to come because of the level of disobedience and unfaithfulness in their heart in the season before they die. He comes in that sense, in the sense of our physical death.

STRATEGIC VISITS

Then He comes to churches and people. This is what He is talking about right here. At strategic times, the Lord will visit people—market place assignments, families, churches, ministries. He will come strategically with a purpose to promote or demote. You do not know when. He does not come every day of every week. It is every several years. There is no specific time, we do not know. I am talking about the sort of thing that may happen a couple times in a decade.

When it is a season in which the Lord draws near, He draws near to your life or your situation with the design to promote or demote. He comes to give a season of increase in the grace of God, which does not always mean more numbers and more money. That is not what increase always means. It could even be an increase of our heart connect with God. Or He comes in that season and He says, “I came and I checked you out,”

HE WILL COME UNEXPECTEDLY

He does this all throughout history. It is a very Biblical concept. You do not hear about it much. It is a very important biblical concept. The Lord looks at individuals and ministries—at His people to whom He has given assignments—in order to promote them or demote them in a particular season. He says, “You do not know when that is. When I come and I find you faithful, I will give increase. If I find you unfaithful, you will suffer loss because of your own unfaithfulness. I will come

unexpectedly and it results in you suffering loss which you need not have suffered if you had simply watched. You do not know when I am coming” (v.3 paraphrased).

I have been in ministry for thirty years—full-time ministry. The Lord has come a number of times. “Lord, is this next summer, this next year a season when you are drawing near with that divine evaluation, that strategic evaluation?” Of course the Lord knows all things at all times. There are times when He intervenes in our affairs in these governmental ways to give increase or decrease.

I am saying, “OK Lord, is 2008 one of those years?”

The Lord might say, “I am not telling you.”

“Well Lord, am I a couple years away from that critical moment?”

“Maybe, or it might be a couple days away.”

“Oh man. Well I better get with it.”

“There you go. Because if you do not, My coming will be to you as a thief because you will have suffered loss, but I am not the thief who made it happen. The thief who made it happen was your unresponsive heart. I came like a thief but the real thief was your unresponsive heart.”

Yes the devil is involved and all of that, but at the end of the day, we hold the key.

DEVELOP A LIFESTYLE OF ENCOUNTER

In paragraph D, He tells him, “Be watchful. Develop a lifestyle of encounter.” It did not say, “Be anointed when you are watchful.” You cannot make that happen. You can only show up and position yourself. You cannot make the Spirit move on you. My point is that, when you do not feel a thing, you are still doing your part.

The Lord did not tell me to be anointed in prayer, He effectively said, “Pray.” He says, “Sometimes you will be anointed, sometimes you will not. In My book, the pay is the same. I am going to give you what I give you, unrelated to what you feel while you are doing it.”

I do not like to overly gauge how great the prayer time was, private or corporate, because some of the most boring prayer times—the Lord is not moved by that standard. He is moved by other things. He is moved by humility, Isaiah 66:2 (paraphrased): “To this one I will look, to the one who is contrite and who trembles at My Word. I will draw near to that one.”

CORNELIUS

I look at some of the times God intervened in history. Surprising intervention. The one I think most about is in Acts 10, about Cornelius, this Roman soldier. He is not born again and does not have the Holy Spirit. He probably does not have a Bible, because the Greeks—the Gentiles—did not have one. He does not have any good worship tapes, no Starbucks coffee. It is five guys in the prayer room. Just imagine these Roman guys. No Holy Spirit, no Bible, no prophetic music. I bet it was a great prayer meeting.

He said the angel appeared and gave him the shock of his life in Acts 10. The angel says, “I remember all of your prayers.”

Cornelius says, “You are kidding.” I can picture him, because I picture myself in a situation like that, saying, “You are kidding. You counted those?”

“I remember those. They are a memorial in heaven.”

“Are you kidding?”

No Holy Spirit in the prayer meetings, no prophetic music, no Bible, no prophets, just a bunch of Roman soldiers sitting around—about four or five of them in a hut. What a horrible prayer meeting. I have been to a bunch of those. I am losing my inner healing just remembering them.

But the angel appeared to him and said, “God has remembered all of them” (Acts 10:4, paraphrased). It was the shock of his life.

Enough on that. I could talk forever, you could talk forever on the need to watch. We all know what it means. We have to do it.

HOW TO STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

Paragraph E. How do you strengthen things as a leader? Whether you are in the home, in the marketplace, in any kind of ministry, here is how you strengthen

things. It is really simple. It is costly, but it is not confusing. You say it. You say it all the time. You say the values all the time. Then you model them. It does not work to have a leader who says the values, but does not do the values.

People do not do what the leaders do, they do what the leaders did recently. They only do what the leaders have been doing recently. If the leaders were to strengthen their prayer ministry, they need to call the people to it regularly. They need to do it, and they need to enforce it publically. I am not talking about a heavy handed thing, though sometimes it is important to be strong although I am not talking about public rebukes.

THE CONSEQUENCES

There are consequences, there are consequences at various levels. If a person at a certain level does not follow through—in family life, in business life, in church life, they do not get the privilege of authority in that position. In other words, they are removed. That is a public statement, even if you do not make it public. You have to enforce what your values are, and the others see it and say, “Wow, this is serious.”

I will not have leaders at IHOP–KC who will not come to the prayer meetings regularly. I have had a number of leaders in the eight or nine years now, whom I have asked to not be leading. I went to them privately. Nobody knows the story. I said, “I am not going to have leaders who are not doing this.” Some of the other leaders said, “This is kind of serious.”

There is no possible way that we can do what we are called to do, if we do not do these three things. We have to say it all the time, the leaders have to model it, and you have to make changes in the leaders who will not do it. That is what I mean by enforcing it publically. You have to make changes. It is true at the family level and at the business level. That is how you strengthen what you have. It is simple, just costly.

He is telling the church in Sardis to remember. He is talking about the great Asian revival. He is telling them to hold fast to the dedication they had back in Acts 19-20, when all of Asia was being touched by the word of God.

THREE PROMISES

Now we are going to look at the three promises. He give them three basic promises in verse 5 (paraphrased): “The one who overcomes will be clothed in white garments. The one who overcomes, I will not blot out his name from the book of Life. The one who overcomes, I will confess his name before My Father.”

These are not automatic benefits to every born again believers. It is an empty promise if they are. Jesus does not mean what He says or say what He means if it is already guaranteed, whether they overcome or not. He is talking to born again believers who were not overcoming in the context of remembering, watching, and holding fast. That is what He is talking about in this context.

GARMENTS IN THE AGE TO COME

Let’s go to paragraph B. They are going to walk in white. To walk in white, the whole realm of garments in the age to come, really is a fascinating study. Eight times in the book of Revelation there is a reference to garments, referring to the age to come. You and I will wear garments in the age to come, which will all differ from one another, just like they do in this age.

There are all levels of society, many different countries, and there are different garments depicting status, stature, knowledge, honor, or lack of honor. The wardrobe in a prison is different from the wardrobe in a palace. Clothing says so many things and in the age to come, clothing will express this.

WHITE ROBES

Where people lose their way with this is the fact that we know we are going to get white robes. We will get white robes. Do not think that billions of people for billions of years all wear the same white shirt forever. Sometimes, just for fun, I will ask someone what they think the garments will be like?

“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean? I said it clearly.”

They never thought about it. “You mean, the white shirt thing?” “You mean, for billions of years, billions of people get to wear the same white shirt? That is it?”

Look at the number of flowers, the texture, the colors, the fragrance. Look at the number of fish at the bottom of the sea, on the documentary channel, these strange

looking fish. The creative God did not somehow stall out and make us wear the same white shirt forever. “Oh, I forgot. I was so into what they were going to eat, what are they going to wear? Oh, no. I got stuck on the white shirt thing.” No! No! Not remotely.

Number one. White it is the word for bright—not every time, but a number of times. It means levels of glory. Let’s look at C before I get into that. Because these garments are not the gift of righteousness—“the robe of righteousness” garments which everybody has.

DIVERSITY OF GARMENTS

The type of garments which a president or a king or a ruler wears is very different on every occasion. Whether it is a state occasion or a family occasion, or whether they are going to a wedding, or a military event; there is every possible diversity, depending on the context. You will have many, many garments in the age to come. This might shock you, but maybe more than you have now. I do not know. My guess is you might have a lot more than you have now because of all the diversity of the interactions and different strata of God’s purposes in His kingdom.

Our garments are dynamically affected by our faithfulness right here. This is what He effectively says, “Repent, get a bigger vision than just having immediate comfort, physically, spiritually, financially.” What do I mean about spiritually? I mean feeling a little bit better. We have to have a bigger vision than that for our life.

Paragraph C. He makes it clear that the garments we will be wearing will be a reflection of our righteous acts on the earth. Notice the garments of the Bride in Revelation 19. They are not white, they are clean and bright. Some translations use white for bright. It is talking about the glory of God. Every one of us will have a different degree of glory—of brightness—in our garments.

GARMENTS FOR THE PRIESTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Paragraph D. Look at the Old Testament garments which God created and designed for the priesthood. Look what it says in Exodus 28. This is the Lord’s word. The Lord came up with this idea. The Lord gave this to Moses. “Make holy garments for the priests. Make them for glory and make them for beauty” (v.2, paraphrased). This is God’s idea.

The garments of the Old Testament priesthood, give us a mere token of insight into the garments we will have in the age to come. Beloved, the garments you will have, will be for glory. Your garments will communicate the glory of God at various levels. They will be for beauty. God did not forget glory and beauty and significant meaning, in garments.

ENDLESS VARIETY

Look at Zechariah 6 where the high priest was going to have an elaborate crown. There will be so many different types of crowns. Some imagine that they will all look the same. They think that we will all have white shirts and the same crown. No, get rid of that idea. There will be more diversity in the age to come among the people of God than there is right now, because we will have creativity and an endless amount of resource. We will have a clean spirit.

If people could get a really clean spirit, they would get out of comparison and they would get into a true creative flow with God's heart. Not just trying to outdo the next guy, whatever the style is, just outdo high or outdo low. We get into a whole different creative spirit, if we are not comparing ourselves with others and trying to outdo the other group and if we get into a clean spirit. The garments differ in color.

RADIANT GARMENTS ARE LINKED TO OBEDIENCE

Paragraph H. The "white" speaks of brightness. Look at this passage in 1 Corinthians 15:41-42: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection." As one star differs from another—billions of stars and not one star is the same. There is not one of you who will be the same in eternity. You will differ in glory as every star differs from the other.

Your garments will be radiant. The white garments he is talking about, is not the white robe, the automatic robe that everybody gets. Which is, by the way, a robe of light. They will be garments with light in them. They will all have different levels, but our garments are many more than the robe.

When you look at the garments of the high priest, there were about twelve or thirteen different facets to them. Not just a robe. The robe was only one of about ten or fifteen facets. Yes, we will all probably have a robe that has the glory of God in it, like a diamond. There will be various degrees of glory, but our garments will be far more diverse from one another than that.

In Sardis's situation the Lord links the garments to the way they obeyed the call to be watchful.

Look at this passage in Matthew 17:2. When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, His garments became as white as light. In Psalm 104:2, it says that God wears garments of light. The angels in Revelation 15:6 have linen garments, which is bright linen. Many colors undoubtedly, but it is bright.

Paragraph L. I have listed the different colors which are associated with the throne of God: jasper, sardius, sapphire and emerald. There are many colors around the throne and in the Being of God. You will all have different colors in your garments and crowns and thrones—those who have crowns and those who have thrones. Not everybody by any means will have a crown and a throne in the age to come. They will all have garments and they will have various levels of them.

Roman Numeral VII. The Lord tells the church at Sardis, “You press in and break through, you overcome and you see it through to an end; this will affect your garments for sure—the brightness of your garments” (Rev. 3:5, paraphrased). Not just the purity of them, but the purity of your garments opens the door to the array of glory which will be in our garments—all the light and all the colors, etc. Some people will think that our garments will only be white. Never does the Bible say that. The Bible makes it very clear that it is just the opposite. It will not just be one robe or one shirt and it will not be just white. That view does not fit with the God of infinite creativity or the God who has made Himself clear in the Bible.

PROMISE FOR OVERCOMERS

He says, “I will not blot his name from the book.” (v.5). Right here, He is not talking about them losing their salvation. He is giving them a promise. This is a promise, not a threat. He is saying, “If you overcome . . .” He is giving promises, not warnings, right here. All the promises of all seven letters are all positive promises. This is a positive reality.

What has happened is that they have already lost the honor of their dedication from the former years by the way they have been living. Their garments are already spoiled and defiled. He is saying, “If you will break through and repent, that which is about to be forgotten will not be forgotten in terms of your dedication on the earth” (v.5 paraphrased). He is saying, “You are so close to it being erased” (v.5,

paraphrased). He is not saying that they are going to hell. That is not what He is talking about. He is saying, “I will remember them, but I am close to not remembering them” (v.5, paraphrased), remembering them in the sense of reward.

A PERSON’S NAME IN THE SCRIPTURE

God has perfect knowledge, so He remembers everything, but He does not remember it with a negative consequence. He is talking about not losing the honor which is associated with their name. A person’s name before God in the Scripture has to do with their character and the testimony of their life. Their name is not just their first and last name.

When it says, “You have a good name”, it does not mean your name rhymes or you have a popular name. It means that it is a reflection of your character over a long period of time. Not just one act, not just one heroic act over seventy years of your life. He is talking about the sum total of how God evaluates our life.

Paragraph B. In the ancient world, the city would have the registrar and they would record events, just like they do today—very similar to today actually. They would record the taxes, they would record the noble deeds, the Olympic victories, the military victories. They would put them in the records of the city, or in the criminal records. It was very similar to today. There are records about lots of people, good and bad. They were understanding that.

ETERNAL REWARDS

What the Lord is promising this church, which has lost its fire and which is about to lose its reward, He is promising them that they will not lose it, if they press in. It is as if He is saying, “A few of you are doing OK, but the vast majority of you are on the verge of losing all you gained in those early days.”

That is such a new idea to many people because they do not think much about heaven. They do not think much about the age to come. They have not studied eternal rewards. The idea that they would ever lose anything is just a strange idea. It is clearly a Biblical truth and clearly a New Testament truth. We will lose things in the age to come as born again believers, if we do not press into obedience to the end. That is an absolute fact. I do have the verse here, 1 Corinthians 3:15, Paul talks about the people who suffer loss of reward, but they are saved as though by fire. They are saved, but they have suffered the loss of reward.

He tells the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:11(paraphrased): “ Do not let anybody steal your crown. Do not go with wrong values and let your crown be stolen in the age to come.” He is not talking about them losing their salvation. He is talking about them losing their reward by responding to people who were motivating them to lower their standards. Beloved, if you hear a false teaching on grace, and you lower your standard of pressing into God, you allow that guy to steal your crown from you.

In 2 John 8 (paraphrased), John says, “ Do not lose that which you have worked for.” That is what He is talking about right here. The church of Sardis is about to lose its name—its record or remembrance—with consequence of reward. God does not forget it, “Oh, I do not remember”—that is not what that means. It means that He does remember with consequence.

HE WILL CONFESS YOUR NAME

What is going to happen when we stand before the Lord is that the Lord Jesus is going to tell your story before the Father and the angels. It does not mean that He will confess your name one time.

“Mike Bickle passed. Come through.”

“Oh, hey, I got a question.”

“Move on. Come on, the line is behind you. Move on. I said your name.”

“We have billions of years to go.”

“I said your name.”

That is not what is going on here. For the Lord to confess your name does not mean that He says it once and you get into the city. Surely that is an important point, but that is not at all what He is talking about right here. The Lord will be before the Father and before the angels and they will tell the story of your name. Julie Meyer. The Lord will say, “Father, let me tell you about Julie.” The Father already knows. Jesus loves telling it and the Father loves hearing it. The angels are saying, “Hallelujah!” and Julie says, “I cannot believe you remembered that.”

JESUS WILL TELL YOUR STORY

This is real—the vision of the Son telling your story; not once and then saying “Hey, see you again in a billion years.” I am talking about the fact that your story will be told by the Lord Himself, as a leader.

Whether it is to ten people or at a staff meeting, I love to highlight one of the guys or gals who are dedicated. I like to brag on them. Not just in order to bless them. It is cool that it blesses them. I love it, I love the feeling of it. I love to honor them. The people who hear it love hearing it, the Lord loves hearing it and the guy or gal loves hearing it. It is just win, win, win!

The Lord loves it when His people are honored. He says, “You press in, you break through, I will tell the story of your unique dedication. I will tell of the pain you pressed through on, which nobody else knows about. I, Myself, will affirm you in the staff meeting before the Father and the angels. Many times, not just once” (Rev. 3:5, paraphrased). These are awesome promises; awesome for those who will break through.

To repent means to get the big picture vision, to anchor our hope in those eternal rewards. The essence of our life vision is not for somebody to give us a little more money or honor, or to make things a little easier right now. A lot of folks live entirely at that level if a big ministry opens the door for them, and they get to go on a big platform. It may happen but it is as if you do not have anything. It is nothing compared to Revelation 3:5. It may or may not show up in the Lord’s testimony of you. I do not know, but I just care that at the end of the day, I want the Lord to tell the Father the exploits with feeling and insight. Not necessarily outward exploits—some outward—but my heart obedience which nobody else even saw. That is what this means.

A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Look at paragraph D. Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. The Lord listened. The Lord heard them. A book of remembrance was written before the Lord for the people who fear Him and meditate on His Name.

God is writing in His book, things about this meeting right now. He is telling me, through His Word, “Mike, I am excited about the way you pressed My people to move into My heart.”

Jesus says, “Father, you should have seen him. It was fantastic.”

The Father says, “I did see him.” I do not have to be theologically correct right now.

Jesus says, “Father, My heart was moved, the way he magnified Me.”

They will talk about it. By the grace of God, this is what we all want. He writes it in a book when we talk to one another, publically, privately, in prayer, one on one, out of the way, serving in the back room, it does not matter. When we talk, He writes.

REWARDS OF FORMER DAYS CAN BE LOST

Paragraph E. Here is the very important thing which is so often ignored: a person who lives righteously for years draws back from their dedication at the end, though not to the degree where they have lost their salvation. They have drawn back from the dedication of former days, therefore they lose their reward of those former days. That is what He is telling the church of Sardis. Look at Ezekiel 3:20 (paraphrased): “When a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, his righteousness shall not be remembered by the Lord.”

If a guy walks hard for ten or twenty years like the Sardis church did and in the end they are drawing back, the Lord says, “You will relate to Me in the condition in which you came to Me.

That is how I will reward you. I will love you. You will be in the city. I will give you the rewards but the testimony will be according to the way you walked with Me at the end. That is what you chose. That was your final choice.” Look at Ezekiel 18:24 (paraphrased): “When a righteous man turns away from the Lord and commits iniquity, all the righteousness which he has done in the former days shall not be remembered.”

DON'T TRUST IN YOUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Ezekiel 33:13 (paraphrased): “I say to the righteous who trusts in his own righteousness. . . .” That does not mean he trusts in it for salvation. That is not what it is talking about. He says, “I have been dedicated for twenty years, I can go on a little vacation from righteousness for a season.” He is trusting that his righteousness will be stored up and that it will cancel out his rebellion. It does not mean that he is trusting in his own righteousness to get saved. He is counting on

the last two or three decades of faithfulness to carry him through in the next decade of lack of faithfulness. The Lord says, “Tell that guy that his previous righteousness will not be remembered. It will be cancelled out” (v.13, paraphrased).

Right now in Revelation 3:5, we are talking about their name being blotted out of the book, meaning, that the previous record of their character and their exploits will not be remembered. The church of Sardis was on the line for that being done with them, because it has been years since they were alive, except for a very few who have pressed into the Lord.

THE SEVEN MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I just wanted to tell you about page six in the notes. This is about the seven ministries of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to leave that because this is how Jesus presented Himself, as the one who has the seven spirits. It is as if He is telling Sardis, “I will revive you in these seven ways, but you need all seven of them.” He came to them as the One offering the seven ministries of the Holy Spirit. Beloved, the church in the western world is in a Sardis condition. We will not get revived apart from these seven ministries touching us. Let’s stand.