

Dear Church: The 7 Letters Of Revelation

Well, I would imagine it was an ominous night, the tension thick. It's the waning moments of Jesus' life, a mere few hours before his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, and ultimately his death. And in that moment, he leaves the last supper and heads to the Garden of Gethsemane, one of his absolute favorite places to pray.

He's with his disciples, which seems fitting that he would spend these waning hours with those who mean so much to him. This moment immediately follows the last supper, that meal Jesus shared with his disciples, when he had this old ritual: the Passover meal, Israel's feast to remember and celebrate the liberty of the work of God.

But this time the meal was a bit different. The symbols of the bread, wine, and lamb all provoked a memory within the people of God about what God had done in their past to free them from the bonds of slavery in Egypt. And at some point, Jesus stood up and said, "This is my body broken for you, my blood poured out for you." It was a new twist on an old ritual. It was after that meal, after those words, that Jesus, with the disciples, headed to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now, Matthew, who wrote down this story, said that Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. But that feels a little bit like an understatement—at least our understanding of those two words. Luke, one of the other biographers of Jesus, would say that, in that moment, Jesus was so shaken that he began to sweat blood. Jesus knew what was about to take place. He knew what awaited him. So he goes to the garden to pray with his disciples, and he leaves them there. He says, "Why don't you stay here and pray?"

He then took this inner circle, Peter, James, and John, and goes a little bit further. It's in that place that he sets them there and said, "Stay here, I'm going to go pray." We then hear that famous prayer. "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but what you will." See, it's one of those moments where you see the weight of all that Jesus was carrying: your sin, my sin, and the sin of the world, all of it. This intimacy, this moment you see between Jesus and his Father, is a window into the very soul of our savior. After that, he collects himself and gets up. We read in Matthew 26.

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:40

That phrase, keep watch, is the exact same word from Revelation 3. It can also be translated as wake up. Couldn't you men keep watch for one hour, wake up, keep vigilant, keep watch. It is the famous piercing words of Jesus spoken to his friends on the night of his greatest betrayal. The

tone in Jesus' voice almost seems exasperated, grief-stricken, maybe even let down. And while to most of us, this seems like a distant grief or a fleeting moment of a much larger story. The reality is these words feel a little bit more potent and personal when we begin to view ourselves through the lens of Peter, James, and John. Wake up. Wake up.

We're in the middle of a series called *The 7 Letters of Revelation*. Jesus writes to seven churches in Asia Minor. Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at Jesus' words to these churches that look a whole lot like ours. Churches embedded within a host culture that imposes itself on the church. And the tension these churches faced was what I've called syncretism or conformity. The wanting to just ease the pain and blend in with the world around us. Churches that started with vigor, understood the cost of following Jesus, and began with that ardent desire, but somewhere along the line, they lost their first love. They acquiesced to the contested spaces they found themselves in.

Today, we're in the letter to the church in Sardis. Before we try to understand the message, as with every other message in Revelation, it's important for us not to speculate about the future, but to look backwards. So, before we dig in, let's look more at Sardis. Sardis was a prominent city, an influential city, just like the others. It's in modern-day Turkey. It's a capital city that was known for its wealth, trade, and culture. The city's success had been such that it developed a reputation for luxury and self-sufficiency, leaving it with spiritual apathy, moral indifference, and complacency. That's a good summary for this church. They were satisfied with what it was currently and with what it believed it would become. It had imbibed a similar ethos to the city in which it was embedded, and Jesus' assessment is striking.

You'll notice a few different things for the attentive reader between the last letters and this one. I'll point them out along the way, but let's look at Revelation 3:1: "*To the angel of the church in Sardis write: 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.*"

This is the common refrain in each of these letters. Jesus begins by identifying the angel to the specific church. (By the way, don't get caught up with the word, angel. It just means messenger. Most scholars would suggest it's written to the pastor of that church because that is the one who's going to stand up like I am now and read the letter over the congregation.)

The letter always has Jesus identifying himself in a unique way, some way that corresponds with what that church needs. So here, Jesus says two things about himself. He says the words "Of him who has the seven spirits of God." This is a bit cryptic. There's some scholarly debate around exactly what Jesus is trying to communicate here, but it's likely

an allusion to Isaiah 11:2-3. This is when Isaiah is prophesying about the coming king of Israel, who has the sevenfold Spirit of God, a spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge of godliness, and one who fears God. It's Jesus saying that "I am the one that Isaiah prophesied about." It's in summary. It's Jesus saying the Holy Spirit and I are one, working in unison together.

Then he says this other phrase, "The one who holds the seven stars." This is speaking to his authority, and it's spotlighted here as a polemic against Rome and its assertion of power. Rome was believed to say that they held the power of the world. And Jesus is saying, "Actually, I am the one." These words, the one who holds the seven stars, are likely representing the seven churches, but it's more poetic than that. It speaks to holding all authority.

Seven is a very biblical number, meaning completeness or wholeness. It's Jesus saying, "I am the one who has the Spirit of God, me and the Spirit holding all of the world together." Now, in every letter, it's followed by this introduction of who Jesus is with a commendation. It's the words "I know your deeds." And then, usually in every letter, it says something quite kind and nice about that church to spur them on.

Let's read what Jesus has for the church of Sardis. *"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1b)*. You know that moment at the end of the award ceremony for a youth sports team. Everyone is eating cheap pizza. You're at Chuck E. Cheese, gathering them from the tokens and the tickets. And they're all sitting around the table. The coach gets up and has the certificates and the trophies, and he's going to call up every athlete one by one.

He calls them up, he says, "Kevin was such a hustler. He wasn't very quick. [That's usually what I heard.] But he worked hard. He was a good teammate." Then he hands him the award. Now, if you've ever been a part of one of those moments, you know, as other kids are waiting, there is eager expectation for their name to be read.

All seven of these letters would've traveled to every one of the churches, and a pastor like me would've stood in front of the congregation and read every single letter. So Sardis is sitting there thinking about Ephesus. "I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. Here's your certificate and here's your trophy."

Then Smyrna, "I know your afflictions in your poverty," Pergamum, "I know how hard it is where you live." Thyatira, "I know your deeds, your love, your faith, and your service and perseverance." And then the coach says, Sardis, "I know your deeds." I can imagine the church thinking, "All right, now it's our turn!" He says, "You got a reputation for being alive, but you're dead." Thanks, Coach Jesus. Do I still get my certificate and my trophy along with these harsh words? A harsh opening, a harsh diagnosis of the actual reality of the church.

What makes it all the more potent is that this idea of having a reputation of being alive would indicate that Sardis thought they were crushing it; they thought they were doing well. Jesus says, "Everything looks great, but you're actually dead inside." Harsh words, a challenging word. It's one of two letters out of the seven, where Jesus has no commendation;

he does not offer nice words to this church. Instead, he cuts straight to the heart. He says, "You have a reputation."

Now that's a good translation of that word. The Greek word is *anoma*, and it's a good one, but it can also be translated as name, which is helpful. Later on in the letter, when Jesus is talking about how he will never blot out their name, the one who confesses the name of Jesus before his father and his angels will be saved.

This threat to name, of reputation, is helping pull the whole letter together. It's this concept of not just the phonetic sounds that, when said, turn your attention to them, but your reputation, your name, what you've become known for. Jesus says that their reputation is that of being alive, but they are dead. That represents a different reality from what they were anticipating. It's past evidence of a faith within the church that had garnered respect from the surrounding area. So much so that people would look at this church and thought they were doing well, but Jesus said the opposite.

We get this, don't we? Reputations are like currency in our world. It's how you determine how you'll spend or invest your money. It's like this week; I have people working on my back deck. It's how I'm certain we pick the reputation of these people that will carry them forward. It's the assumption that what was true in the past must be true of what will be in the future.

Reputation is how you decide where you eat. "They have to be 4.7 stars or above on Yelp. I won't go any lower than that." Reputation. It's like currency. But at the same time, reputations are not always honest reputations. They don't always speak to the reality of what actually is. This is what Jesus is getting at.

The reputation of Sardis, although good, did not match the reality of the kingdom in their life. While the reputation may have looked alive at some point, the alignment between what they thought of themselves and what Jesus assessed them as was wildly different. So, what's the specific critique? If that's the reputation, why is it that Jesus is identifying this?

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, 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. vv. 2-3

Wake Up!

Two things constitute the specific critique against the church in Sardis. The first is to wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die. I have found your deeds unfinished. The Greek word for deed is *érgon*. It means work, deed, or behavior, but there's some nuance to this. The word *érgon* is a deed or an action that carries out or completes an inner desire. It's this combination of inner desire and outer work.

Jesus identifies their deeds as incomplete, which potentially means two things. Either they had the inner desire to follow Jesus that never manifested in their actual life, or they had the externals that looked

really good, yet internally they had allowed the fire to grow dull. It's the congruence, the integration between your innermost being and your outermost living. Am I caught up in the life of God so much that it just pours out of me?

He says that their deeds, the way they are living, are incongruent with the internal and the external. There is a severing between the two. Something is off kilter. It's one thing to project an image of being put together. It's a whole other thing to allow that to form from the inward depths of your being and work itself into the ordinariness of your day. There was something in the church of Sardis where they were reserving parts of themselves and just going through the motions. Jesus will ask much of us.

As the old C.S. Lewis quote goes, "Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or Lord, but he cannot be anything else." The claim that Jesus is Lord is one of totality. It's one that absolute allegiance must be placed under him. He's either the one who calls us to full allegiance—Lord, or he is simply a lunatic. One who has gone off his rocker, who's making claims about being the Son of God that we all would scoff at. Or maybe he's just a liar and is presenting himself as something other than who he is. But the church in Sardis, and what you and I know is that Jesus is, in fact, Lord, and therefore we must submit, in totality, our allegiance to Jesus. That's another word for faith, giving all of ourselves over to Jesus.

However, something was off in the church of Sardis. They'd learn to pretend or to play the way of Jesus. But Jesus offers instructions to counter these charges, and we're going to unpack them soon. He says, "Remember and repent." These two things. Remember what you've received and repent from the place from which you have fallen. Remembering is an active holding onto of that which was once true and finding our life within that stream. It's returning to the beauty of God breaking into your life.

The first critique against the church is that somewhere along the way, their outward expression of their faith had dried up, had grown inconsistent with their inward lives. But I mentioned two critiques. So let's look at the second.

Yet 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. 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. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. vv. 4-6

Syncretism

The second charge that Jesus acknowledges within the Christians of Sardis is that some of them haven't soiled their clothes, which means the majority of people have soiled their clothes. This is graphic imagery. Jesus doesn't hold anything back. There are two possibilities of what is meant by the soiling of clothes.

The first is a pretty basic reading that threads the wake-up narrative. It's the metaphor that apathy and complacency had so permeated this church, and they'd grown so lazy that they wouldn't even change their clothes. They're just sitting in their own filth. The other one that scholars identify as a more specific reference, which probably holds more truth because it aligns with the sins of syncretism that we've talked about.

It's that this community was participating in pagan worship services that contained such immoral acts that would result in soiling the clothing of its participants. To be quite frank, I decided not to talk about it because it's pretty gnarly. I'll allow your minds to go where it goes. But the idea was that they were participating in these pagan worship services while presenting and proclaiming the name of Jesus. And Jesus says there are some, a few of you who haven't soiled your clothes, but the rest of you, you're caught up in all sorts of different sins.

Jesus then says that if this continues, the church in Sardis will suffer the same fate as the city, and he uses this phrase, "He will come like a thief." What are we going to make of this statement? Traditionally, we think of this as the second coming, which is an illusion of that. But it's helpful to understand a little bit of the history of Sardis, because Jesus is both doing that work of one day Jesus will come back like a thief, unknown when and where, but now is also linking with a greater metaphor.

The residents of Sardis would've known that some six centuries earlier than the arrival of this letter, they had a history where the thought was that their city was completely impregnable. It could not be taken. It was up on this high hill that was very difficult to access, and so most attempts to overtake the city failed just because of the strategic location of the city. What that fostered was an arrogance within the King of Sardis, who would sit on his laurels, thinking no one could come get in simply because of where they were.

This is where it crosses a little bit into myth, but it holds true. The story is that there were some guards who were watching over the city, and the Persians were hiding off in the distance, trying to strategize how they would take the city. It's believed that the guards had gotten so drunk and engaged in revelry that, at one point, a soldier's helmet fell off the tower. So he walked down to get it, and in that moment, he actually exposed a back route into the city to the Persians who were looking off in the distance.

Because of their arrogance and apathy, Cyrus and the Persians went around the city and conquered Sardis in 547 to 546 BC. That part is not a myth. The city was razed to the ground. How they found the route in is where it's a little bit dicey, but it makes for a good story. The reality is, somewhere along the way, their apathy allowed them to be taken. Their complacent thinking, actually made them vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. They were known for being alive. They had a vivacious reputation, and yet they were raised to the ground.

Everyone in Sardis would've known the history of their own city. Jesus says, "Just like that thief came, so, too, I will come and may destroy this church because it's not giving its allegiance to me." They had a reputation for being alive and yet were dead. The problem is that the church in Sardis had failed to see and hold the grand story.

The grand story was not one about their own ability, their own comfort, and strength. It was always about uniting themselves with the work of Jesus. It's the whole story about transferring our allegiance from the old creation that's passing away to the new creation, which is coming. This is always the story. Jesus, the Kingdom of God. Present reality and future hope. It is that tension that you live in the present reality of the kingdom of God, but you also hold to the hope that one day this kingdom will usher itself in. In the meantime, the work of discipleship to Jesus, of submitting to that lordship, is preparing you for when that life enters into this moment.

Paul in Philippians 3 says this so well. He goes through this whole list of all his accomplishments, and then he says,

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. Philippians 3:7-9

He is saying that all of these things he knew, the things he has done, if he accumulated all of his successes, and projected them out, they would have a reputation. Paul, of anyone in the New Testament, had a reputation of being zealous for God, but in all the wrong ways, in the Pharisaical sense of viewing his ability as his own salvation. Then he has that moment in the book of Acts where he was knocked to the ground and encountered Jesus. When he had that moment, he said, "Everything I've ever done is garbage. It's nothing compared to knowing Christ." Paul had a reputation for being alive, but he never let that passion squelch. He was living.

Then we get to verse 10. Paul starts by saying, "I want to know Christ," which has always been so humbling to me. Because this is Paul, the apostle author of the New Testament, and he's saying that he wants to know Christ? Paul, don't you know Jesus already? Don't you already live intimately in union with him?

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Phil. 3:10-11

There are two words for "know" in Greek. One is head knowledge. It's the idea of knowing facts about something, and then there's an intimate experiential knowledge. It is similar to the difference between a friend who could share facts about my wife and talk about where she went to school, the job she has, and the accomplishments she's made, and me telling you more. I could tell you how I know her. There is a depth of intimacy in relationships. Paul says, "I want to know Christ. I want to live in union with him."

Notice the pathway that Paul lays out in verse 10. He says the path to that knowledge is to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Other translations change the word participation to fellowship. I want to have fellowship with the sufferings of Christ because Paul understood that when he unites himself with the death of Jesus, in some miraculous, grace-filled way, the resurrection of Jesus is also imbued in us. Because when we find ourselves caught up in Christ, we find our identity in that new creation that is breaking in. So, somehow, we participate in that resurrection life right here and now.

The church in Sardis, probably at some point, wanted that as well. So how did it fall into this state of sleepiness? The command of Jesus was to wake up. We're all familiar with that. Whether you're the one giving that to the sleepy teenager, or whether it's the sharp nudge of an elbow at the movie theater—wake up! We're familiar with that experience. It's jarring. It's something that alerts you. It's the alarm clock that blares way too early at an hour that shocks you awake.

What is it that caused this church to fall asleep? I would imagine when someone, the angel to the church in Sardis, was reading this letter and came to the words, wake up, they were startled. Hopefully, it caused them to question what was making them sleep.

I'm extrapolating two things that are the cause of their sleepiness. Those things are complacency, which is countered with the act of remembrance, and self-deception, which is countered with the act of repentance. Let's talk about each one in turn.

Complacency and Remembrance

The direct implication of this church sleeping is that they had fallen into a state of indifference, apathy, and complacency. It's the state of their souls in their life with God that Jesus says to "Wake up, you've fallen asleep."

Jesus is saying to this church that the reality of their life with Jesus was different from what they believed about them. Complacency often creeps in from a diminishing of the soul's fire for more. Complacency isn't a quick process; it's a slow diluting of our sense of Jesus and the embracing of lesser loves in an effort to stoke the fire that we once held for God.

Jesus' command after saying to wake up was to restrengthen what remains. That seems to indicate entropy, something that had diminished over time. They once had this strong, vibrant connection with Jesus, but it was dwindling away. It was about to die. What happens, just like it did for the city of Sardis, was their arrogance, their pride of thinking they had it all figured out, slowly diluted the hunger and thirst for Jesus in such a way that their souls had been hollowed out.

When we allow complacency to shape our hearts and control our days, we then run to other things, lesser loves, idols, and sins, to reawaken the soul. Because you were created for deep things. You were created with eternity in your hearts. The problem is not desire. Desire is a God-given gift. You were created to desire from the depths of your being, so much so that the only thing that could satiate that desire is an equally eternal

being. That which is a God eternal desire placed in your heart that is only quenched through properly loving and seeking the eternal God. C.S. Lewis writes one of my all-time favorite quotes on page two of his essay, "The Weight Of Glory."

It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea, we are far too easily pleased. Lewis, "The Weight Of Glory"

See, the problem is not that we desire too much, it's that we desire too little. We don't desire the deepest thing in our souls. Complacency is about settling. It's about giving in to a strong desire that is not our deepest desire. What you were created for is union with God, and often we stumble about with sex, ambition, and success, thinking that will satisfy, but those are lesser loves. All of them are meant to stir something in you, pointing you to that eternal longing in God.

Complacency is a diminishing, erosion, and dulling of your senses to things that are lesser. Then you turn to those lesser loves in hopes of reigniting the spark. Jesus says to wake up. Those things don't do what you think they will do.

In the story that I opened with, there are two ways to read into Jesus' words. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" You can read it with an angry Jesus, and maybe there's some of that in there. But it could also be that maybe the disciples had grown dull to what was to come, the suffering that was there, and they said, "Hey, we're out. We're tuning out. We're dulling that sense." Somehow, when the pressure came, they gave in to that complacency.

Just like Peter, we deny Jesus over and over and over. See, maybe those words of Jesus are "Wake up, could you not find what your heart most longs for, for even an hour? Wake up, pray that you don't give in to temptation."

Do you remember what he said at the end? The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The flesh is not the problem. It's the means through which you commune with God. Your body is important in the work of Jesus. He's trying to awaken who you are. The flesh is weak, but your spirit is willing. Wake up, strengthen what remains.

The counter to this is the act of remembrance. Remembrance is in the spiritual life. It's one of the most repeated commandments throughout the Bible. Often, Jesus is calling the people of Israel to remember who he is and what he has done for them. It's the frequent invitation of the God of the scriptures. Why? Because when you grow complacent, when your soul is diminished and eroded, it is remembrance that pulls you back to the time when God had moved, for which your heart most stirs deeply.

Remembrance is not just recalling events that took place in the past. It is about learning to see and live within God's activity through your life. It's about identifying God's movement and applying that reality to

the everydayness of your lives. Remembrance is not just about meeting God on the top of Mount Sinai, but it is also about the everyday manna. The provision of God over and over that is a lot less thunderous than on the mountain. But is it any less of a miraculous remembrance that will awaken your heart? Remembrance is to go into your ordinary, frustrated, broken, and even joyous life, and remember what is the source of all that is good in this world.

We go complacent when we allow the frustrations of this life to blind us to the presence of God in the midst of them. The spiritual practice of remembering is to reflect on the activities of God and shove them into your present moment. It's to say in that frustrated state, "God, where are you? I don't see you." But it holds onto hope to say, "But you, God, did this. And I'm going to remember that right here in this moment." We can remember it in the frustration of infertility or in the heartbreak of a wayward child. It is to remember what God has done right in the midst of the ordinariness of life.

It is important to remember that God has not abandoned you, God has not left you. It is to remember that God is moving, was moving, and will continue to move in your life. Without remembering, our fidelity to Jesus and the embrace of life through the offer of Jesus will be diminished, satiated by things less than God, and they will leave you empty and hollow. "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard;" Hold on to that strength and what remains.

Self-deception and Repentance

Secondly, self-deception is countered by the act of repentance. The self-deception in Sardis was that they had a reputation for being alive. They had followed Jesus for some time. That's what they believed about themselves, but they were self-deceived. I would imagine when Jesus said, "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." It wouldn't have just been offensive, it would've been confounding. They thought they were doing all the right things. They thought they were living in the way that God desired.

To have a reputation of being alive can lead to failing to assess one's own life accurately. Now, that could be for a lot of different reasons, simple avoidance, projection, or whatever it is. There are a lot of different reasons that we are self-deceived. The problem in self-deception is one often doesn't know.

Another term for it is your "blind spot." There's a reason it's called a blind spot. It's because you can't see it. You're blind to it. By nature, we are bent away from facing reality. By nature, we aren't as willing to perceive the truth of who we are from top to bottom. We are staggeringly good at self-deception or however you want to word that.

I'm reminded of the activist and theologian, James Baldwin, who said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Until you face the reality of who you are from top to bottom, you cannot change. Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is a cancer that metastasizes through our bloodstream and throughout our entire being.

Maybe an example will help you. I think I'm a lot better golfer than I am. I'll stand on a tee and shank one into the woods. Then I'll stand over that same ball five minutes later with a little three-foot window, and I'll think that I can punch it out through there. Self-deception is a cancer. It metastasizes through our body. There's a high level of self-deception within me, and I don't think I'm the only one. Self-deception is a greater risk for those who are long-time followers of Jesus because we can do all we know are the right things to do, but it is all for the wrong reasons or for an inner desire that's diminished. We lose the deep desire that God has placed within us.

As a pastor, I can be viewed as a professional Christian. You realize how weird that is for a lot of reasons. When I stand here, I am most prone to self-deception. I do a lot of things for God. Nearly everything in my job is centered around that. They're explicitly Christian things. I preach. I pray. I administer the sacraments, I lead. I meet with people. I do all of these things, but the reality is that I can have a reputation of being alive. I've been around this thing long enough, almost 22 years, that I know the right things to say. I know the right things to do, yet the caution, the thing that God evokes in my soul, is to not let that gap between who I project myself to be and who I am grow because I deeply want to be an integrated person.

My hope is that when you encounter me in the courtyard, in my office, or at Safeway, you have a similar experience. I won't preach at you there, I promise, but hopefully my character is consistent. I so badly, like Paul, want to know Christ. I don't want to have a reputation of being alive and yet be dead inside. All of us are prone to that. We are prone to present ourselves one way and yet are a different way.

Jesus says that the antidote to that is repentance. What I have found is that remembrance and repentance go hand in hand. When you remember who God is and what he's done in your life, it naturally leads to repentance because you realize where you have drifted. Repentance is the reality of naming that gap between who we project ourselves to be and who we actually are.

It's looking square at who we are and no longer being self-deceived. It's saying, "Lord, I am way off from where I want to be. God, would you forgive me of that sin? Would you usher me back into a life with you?" That's repentance. Sometimes there's lots of guilt that comes with that. Other times, it's just the awakening, the moment in which you realize your life is not where you thought it would be.

Repentance is the way back. The call to remember and repent is not about recalling memories or managing your guilt. It is about reentering the life-giving, transformative power of the gospel here and now. That's the invitation before every single one of us. It's the invitation that God, through his grace, leaves open to the church in Sardis.

He says, "Wake up!" You can read that as anger, but could it not be the loving moment of a parent crying out to their child, "Don't go in the street!" It's not anger, it is care, it's love. Wake up, strengthen what remains. Some of you haven't soiled your clothes. Stand with them. Church return, repent from that which you have come. The invitation is always back into the loving embrace of Jesus. Couldn't you stay awake for one hour?

I wonder if this morning God is echoing those words to you. "Wake up! Wake up!"

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1498-5FC