

Text: Revelation 3:1-6 (Pew Bible, pg.1217)

Title: “No Turning Back”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles with me to Revelation 3:1. In Revelation 2-3 there are seven letters addressed to seven ancient churches, all of which needed encouragement to be radically faithful in the place where the Savior had positioned them.

READ TEXT. These letters call upon us to look upward (v.1a), look inward (vv.1b-4), and look forward (vv.5-6).

NOTICE THE DESCRIPTION HERE OF OUR SAVIOR.

Revelation 3:1a - “These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

The “seven spirits of God” is probably a reference to the fullness of Holy Spirit who rests upon and dwells within Jesus with all completeness. So when Jesus speaks and acts in His church, He does so by the Holy Spirit. We must be attentive to what the Spirit is saying to our church. We need the work of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness in our church. And in times of revival, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is intensified.

The “seven stars” according to Revelation 1:20 are the angels of the seven churches to whom the letters are addressed. These “angels” are probably the pastors or messengers who are charged with the responsibility to deliver the messages to the churches.

NOW LET’S TALK ABOUT SARDIS AND THE CHURCH LOCATED THERE.

This is the most severe letter of the seven Jesus wrote to the churches of Asia. Jesus had nothing much good to say about them. There were only a few members of the church who were living radically faithful lives for Jesus Christ.

Historians tell us that the city of Sardis, at the time of Jesus’ writing this letter, was a city that was rich in former glory. It had one day been one of the most splendid cities in the Roman world, but that had long passed. The city had experienced steady decline into obscurity. And the church mirrored the city.

Revelation 3:1b - “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

ILLUSTRATION – Nan and I were in San Antonio this weekend and we saw a church called Alive Church. That was actually the name of the church. Well that could have been the sign out in front of the church in Sardis, but it wasn’t true of the church. Chuck Swindoll calls the church at Sardis “a morgue with a steeple.”

You and I know full well that it is easy to keep up the appearances of life on the outside when in reality on the inside things are cold and dark. We know how to wear our church mask and appear to have everything together when on the inside things are falling apart. Reputation didn't match reality.

Jesus' perfect *diagnosis* was that they were for all practical purposes ... dead. Jesus also has the *prescription* for their recovery. Jesus loves this church; otherwise He would have just let it die. In vv.2-3 there are five imperatives or commands. They show us what must be done if there is to be revival and recovery of life with no turning back.

1. WAKE UP (v.2a)

Revelation 3:2a - Wake up!

“Wake up” means stay continuously alert. Jesus said, “Wake up! Pay attention. You're dozing off and sleeping through the most important part of life.”

ILLUSTRATION – When I was a college student I served as the youth minister in a church about 15 miles away from where I went to college. One Friday night we had one of those devilish activities called “the lock in.” That means that you lock the doors of the church and you do your best to plan enough activities to keep the students awake all night. Well we finished the lock-in about daybreak and I had to drive home. A scary thing happened to me. As I got close to my apartment I realized I couldn't remember anything that had happened for the last 15 minutes. I had been asleep at the wheel. It's a miracle I didn't kill myself or somebody else.

And if that's the condition of your spiritual life, take responsibility for your spiritual lethargy and awaken yourself. Quit blaming it on someone else. Jesus said, “You, wake up!”

2. STRENGTHEN (v.2b)

Revelation 3:2 - Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

“Strengthen” means to firm up. Jesus said, “You're spiritually flabby and weak. Get back to work.”

QUOTE: Chuck Swindoll in his book *Letters to Churches ... Then and Now* identifies five potential killers of vibrant congregations:

- Worship of the past
- Greater concern for cosmetics than with character
- Love of tradition over love for Christ
- Inflexibility and resistance to change
- Losing evangelistic and missionary fervor

Well Jesus said to them, “Your deeds are not complete in the sight of my God.” What are these “deeds” that are incomplete in God's sight? Compare this to the church in Thyatira, which we studied last week.

Revelation 2:19 - I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

As we near our 100th anniversary as a church in just a few weeks, Jesus is saying to us, “Your work is not finished. Until I come throw yourself into radical faithfulness to Me and to My work in this world.”

Is Jesus saying to you, “Wake up! Get back in the game. Your work isn’t complete in the sight of my God.” Yes, we’re accountable to Him.

3. REMEMBER (v.3a)

Revelation 3:3 - Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard...

Note carefully what Jesus says to remember. He doesn’t say remember your past. When you look back into your past you may revisit some pretty ugly things. Or you may look back and see some great things you’ve done. We’re not to live in the past; that’s not what Jesus says to remember. No, He says remember what you received and heard. He’s talking about the Gospel upon which the church was founded when missionaries first came to Sardis and preached the Gospel.

Any church that doesn’t stay anchored to the proclamation of the Gospel is destined to die, and probably deserves to die. One hundred years ago, our church was started on the foundation of the Gospel. And our future is dependent upon how faithfully we continue in the Gospel that we received.

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the message of the death of Christ for our sins, His burial and His resurrection. It is also the message that this is God’s way of solving man’s big sin problem. And for this truth to impact our lives we must put our faith in Christ for the righteousness that comes as a free gift. That message has to be proclaimed through all we do as a church. Apparently the Sardis church had forgotten that important principle. Remember.

4. OBEY (v.3b)

Revelation 3:3 - Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it...

Revival comes with a renewed conviction of sin and repentance, followed by an intense desire to live in obedience to God. Is there an area of disobedience in your life? Revival is simply God’s people moving into new obedience.

In Psalm 119 the psalmist talks about a time when he was under the discipline of the Lord. He said this:

Psalm 119:67 - Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Obedience means that we will hold to the standard of radical faithfulness to Jesus and His commands.

5. **REPENT** (v.3c)

Revelation 3:3 - Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.

Repentance is the gateway to any new activity of God in our lives. Repent – stop sinning and start obeying. Change the direction of your life. When the direction of individual lives begins to change, then the direction of the entire church begins to change.

So the church was on life support, but it wasn't completely dead.

Revelation 3:4a - Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

There were a few who had retained their radical faithfulness to Jesus Christ. These are men and women who were not afraid to live authentically Christ-like lives even in the sordid city where they lived. They weren't afraid to be faithful witnesses for Christ. They didn't cave in under the pressure to compromise.

Why? Because they had their eye on the prize. And this morning I want to close by asking you to just lift your eyes for a moment to the finish line ... to the eternal life that starts the moment we are saved and stretches all the way into eternity. Look at this amazing life:

- **Walk with Jesus (v.4b)**

Revelation 3:4b - They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

ILLUSTRATION – This weekend Nan and I got to do something pretty cool. The Champions Tour of the PGA had a tournament down in San Antonio. And a professional golfer and his wife who attend our church invited us to come down to the tournament and hang out with them. They gave us these badges that say, “All Access.” That means we got to go into the players dining room. All around me were these golfing legends that I had admired for years. We had “all access” to places that other spectators couldn't go. Why? Because we were somebody important? No! We got to walk into those places and with those people because of the standing of someone else.

And friends, you and I get to walk with Jesus in this life and right into heaven not because we are worthy, but because of the standing of Jesus.

Do you have that kind of walk, that kind of relationship, with Christ today?

- **Dressed in white (v.5a)**

Revelation 3:5a - He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.

When we are saved the Lord takes off the old dirty garments of our sin and places on us the garment of the righteousness of His Son Jesus. So we have a new position in Christ. And then,

because of this position in Christ, we have a new practice in life ... living pure, clean lives before the Lord. Now again, this is a struggle in this life. We fail and sin often. But we can look forward to the day when we will stand before Him with white robes that are pure with the righteousness of Christ and our life before Him will be perfect. No more sin.

What are you wearing today? Are you wearing the old filthy rags of your righteousness, or have you accepted new white garment of the righteousness of Christ?

- **Name never blotted out of the book of life (v.5b)**

Revelation 3:5b - I will never blot out his name from the book of life,

Now what is this book of life? It is the listing of all the redeemed of all the ages. The book of life is the citizenship roll for the Kingdom of God. It is the guest list for those who have been invited into heaven and who have accepted the invitation.

Ultimately there are only two groupings of people that make any difference for now and eternity... only two. There are those who have responded to the call to receive Christ and whose names are in the book of life. And there is the group of people whose names are not on the list. Which group are you in? Has your name been written in the book of life? Have you responded to the invitation of God to come to the eternal banquet? You can do that today.

Many people do not understand salvation. They are filled with the fear that somehow they might fail to conquer and somehow to have their name deleted from the list of God's people. But notice the great assurance that is found in this verse.

Revelation 3:5b - I will never blot out his name from the book of life,

You know, living a radically faithful life for Christ is a challenge for all of us. And it has been that way from the very beginning when Christ called His first disciples. And this verse assures us that when our name is written in the book of life because we have been saved, no failure, no weakness, no sin on our part can cause God to erase our name. In fact, the opposite is true. This is a promise that we will persevere, no matter how fierce the battle with sin and the world becomes.

ILLUSTRATION – Some friends and I ran a race in Colorado this summer. It was a race that was very hard to get into. They had a limited field, and I got on line the first day the registration opened and paid my fee. I got an email response saying that I was registered. We trained all summer long and really looked forward to the challenge of this race. When we arrived in Colorado Springs the day before the race we went to the race headquarters to pick up our bib (the number that you pin on your shirt). I have to admit that as I walked up to the table I was a little nervous. What if I had gone to all this effort to train, and all this expense and trouble to get to Colorado, only to find that they had someone dropped my name from the list, and that I couldn't enter the race. Well, I was greatly relieved when the volunteer ran her finger down the list and then it stopped ... on my name.

Jesus promised this:

John 10:28 - I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

- **Confessed by Jesus (v.5c)**

Revelation 3:5c - but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Church our esteem does not come from what the world thinks of us, or even what we think of ourselves. We must value what Christ thinks of us, and one day He will confess us and acknowledge us before our heavenly Father.

This is eternal life. We get to walk with Jesus. We're worthy, not because of any good things we have done, but because of what He did on the Cross. He takes away our dirty clothes and dresses us in the white robe of His righteousness. He enters our name in the book of life and it will never, by no means, ever be erased. And He's not ashamed to say we are His friend. And one day, you and I get to walk with Jesus into the very presence of God in heaven. There might be an angel stationed at the door. Jesus says, "He's with me. She's with me." We stand radiant before the glory and holiness of God. You know, what happens when you bring a dirty piece of clothing into the light? The dirt shows up even more. What happens when you put something spotlessly clean into the light? It radiates; it glows with the light. Our white robes before the holy God will glow with His glory. And there in the book of life is written your name and my name. And we find something amazing. It has been written there from the beginning of the world. That's what the Bible says about the book of life. Names are recorded there from the beginning of the world. And then we stand before the Father and we hear something amazing. Jesus calls our name – confesses our name – before the Father. And this is not a perfunctory roll call. "Mike ... here. John ... yo. Camille ... present." No, this is Jesus calling you by name before the Father.

Jesus is unashamed to introduce us to the Father. You see, this is what Jesus meant when He said in the Gospels...

Matthew 10:32-33 - "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Friend, why would you decline such a great invitation? Why would you ever want to go through life without the assurance that this eternal life was yours? You can settle that today.