

Rev 25-11-05a

Greetings, those of you who are members of Grace and Truth Bible Church, and by membership, it is that you choose to fellowship with us on a reasonably regular basis. This is the 5th of November, 2025. We're in Revelation chapter three.

We are starting the letter that the Lord Jesus sent to the church at Sardis. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, how aware we are that in the words of the Lord Jesus, he knows our works and the reflection that they contain on our faith and our love and our hope.

We're grateful for this opportunity to look at this portion of your word together and to come to a fresh understanding and appreciation of our salvation and our savior, as well as your overarching plan and purpose as it is unfolding both in human history and in our own lives. We pray that as we look at this portion of scripture together, that the Holy Spirit will be able to teach us and make it memorable so that we will find occasions to put it into practice, to apply it as we think and speak and act, so that we can be fit representatives of the Lord Jesus as members of his body, that we can reflect your glory and learn the skills that will make us fit and useful both now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

We are in a new chapter in Revelation. As you know, our working assumption is that these letters are in some ways chiasmic in structure. There is both a large chiasm with the first and seventh letters corresponding, the second and the sixth corresponding, the third and the fifth, so that we see both comparison and contrast in Ephesus and in Laodicea.

We see comparison more so than contrast when you look at Smyrna and Philadelphia. These two churches have almost nothing by way of criticism and quite a bit by commendation. Everyone wants to either feel like they're being persecuted and they are in Smyrna or they are doing wonderfully well and there is an open door for them in Philadelphia.

Inside that pair, we have Pergamos and Sardis. In the center, the longest and most detailed letter, which is Thyatira, and we will note what this structure helps us to understand as we go forward this evening. But looking at our fresh letter to Sardis in chapter three, Jesus says to the messenger of the church in Sardis, write, these things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before my God. The word my has been left out in your New Kings James, but it should be there.

Remember therefore how you have received and heard. How much emphasis have we seen in these preceding letters? The importance of sound teaching, of biblical truth, of a message that is sourced in God and reflects God's plan and purpose, his wisdom, his power, his program on

this earth as it is being implemented by us. And to strengthen what remains, you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Yet there are a few things which remain, but they are ready to die. It reminds me of watching these programs where they're trying to resuscitate someone in the emergency room and they have no pulse, they have no cardiogram showing, there's no heartbeats, they're flatlined, and they can exist in this state for minutes. And they are, for all clinical purposes, dead.

And yet diligent staff will do CPR, they will bag them, they will pump breath into their body through a device, they will inject them with clot busters or whatever else they think they may need. And they are hoping that by manually pushing the blood through their currently dead system, the clot busting drug might reach the problem and dissolve it so that they will pink up, their circulation will restore, and they will essentially come back to physical life. They are dead.

In some rare cases, they are pronounced dead. And somebody's coming in to turn out the lights and they look and there's movement under the sheet and doctor, doctor, they're not as dead as we thought. And this is what you see in Sardis, you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Sometimes someone has been named as dead and they come back to life. Be watchful, strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. If something isn't done, what appears to be dead will in reality and actuality be dead.

So you've got to strengthen what is left. For I have not found your works perfect, this is complete, fully equipped, fully accomplished before my God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard.

What is it you receive and hear when you are a church? This is the carefully and diligently expressed, communicated and taught word of God. Not opinions, not traditions, not flights of fancy. What is the meat that is in the word of God for those who are earlier in the faith or younger spiritually, sometimes it is milk.

And hopefully there is a combination so that everyone can get the spiritual nutrition they need in a time of fellowship. And there are opportunities, wives are encouraged to ask their husbands at home if they don't understand something. There's plenty of conversation that can go on with believers of like mind who speak the truth to one another in love and encourage one another to love and good works as a reflection of that understanding.

So what is the problem here? Everything is either dead or dying. I watch my wife perform miracles with vegetation, with plants, flowers that appear to be completely dead, but she'll reach down and test a thing and say, I know this looks dead, but you see how it bends? There is still life in and with care, she has resurrected more plants. We have found stuff laying on the asphalt parking lot behind Home Depot and she has brought it home, given it care and nurture and it's blossoming and flowering and dividing and multiplying and doing wonderfully.

And it hadn't been abandoned as a lost cause, but there's life within what looks to be dead and she can strengthen what remains and it's miraculous to behold. This is a rough analogy to what God can do if we change our minds, if we realize that we've gone down a road that leads to death instead of life, we may think the way seems right to us, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. We abandon those ways, we change direction, we change our mind, we change our priorities.

We say, this isn't working. This is Dr. Phil's oft repeated question. You're doing these very poorly thought out things, how's that working for you? You're treating people in a very bad fashion, how's that working? Well, if it's not working, make a change, that's the idea.

So strengthen those things that remain. How do you strengthen them? If Jesus had just stopped and said, strengthen those things that remain, what does that mean? He tells us, remember, remember, we've seen this in Ephesus. Remember the love you had that was foremost.

Do the first works. Remember what you have learned. Remember what you know.

We review, we revisit, we refresh our understanding. If you want a healthy, fruitful, active spiritual life, it doesn't take an all day marathon spiritual journey. It's a matter of doing these things that Jesus mentions here.

Remember how you received and heard, not just what you received and heard it, but how. We in this church are all about the how, aren't we? I don't want to just know what things ought to be. I want to know how to make them so.

I don't want to be told over and over again that I should be spiritual mature. I should have love and faith and hope. I should be this, I should do that.

Tell me how, give me some practical wisdom on get or done, make this happen in my life. It doesn't get any plainer than this. Remember how you received, how you heard.

How does it come? Look at your past life. What is it that has made a difference in the past? Was it pursuing a devotional, reading through streams in the desert, or my utmost for his highest, or regularly watching a program by a particular teacher or pastor? What worked in the past? Not just try to remember what you learned. How did you receive it? How did you hear it? Hearing meaning I hear and heed.

It makes a difference. I can plow it into the ground and I start getting fruit. The word how here, circle it.

Remember how in the past you received and heard what counts, what's got power, the living and powerful word of God that really cut to the quick, that made a noticeable difference. How did you get that? Well, go back to the how. This is the exhortation from the Lord Jesus.

It's very plain. And you notice that the guidance gets much plainer. The deeper we get into error and failure, God doesn't expect us to be theologians and perspicacious to find esoteric detail.

It gets very plain. I don't know how you could not understand, remember how you received and heard the word of God in the past that was effective, that got you started, that put wind in your sails, lift in your wings, power in your life, joy in your soul, fruitfulness in your actions, peace in your thoughts, joy and worship in your prayers, great fruitfulness in your conversations with fellow believers. Where were you? How did that happen? Was it the real deal? Remember how that worked and revisit that, return to that.

If you will not watch, now notice in verse two, he said, be watchful and strengthen. He didn't just say, you need to strengthen the things that haven't died yet. He said, be watchful.

What is it to be watchful? We have a wonderful age where you can get cameras and stick them up on every different corner of your house with overlapping fields of view. You can have security cameras in a building and no one can come or go without their image showing up on a multi-monitor screen, motion sensors, whatever it may be. In the ancient day, if you have a watchman on the wall and you've got a city enclosed with a box wall with four sides, if the watchman is watching to the North and the enemy comes from the South, his watching doesn't do any good.

So it is important to pay attention to what we are watching. Where are we looking? If we're looking in the wrong place, I had this experience, it's very commonplace and a lady I was on the phone with reminded me that my experience was similar to those who look all over for their glasses and they're right up there on their head like this. You search the house and you finally, maybe they fall off of your head or you suddenly are sensible that they're up there.

But I got a very important call and I didn't know where my phone was so I answered it on my smartwatch and I'm talking to the lady but the whole time I'm wondering to the house, where is my phone? And I'm tracking the conversation with her and making sure that we exchange information. And it dawned on me about four minutes in that my cell phone was in my hip pocket where I typically never put it because I don't like sitting on it. But there it was, it was with me the whole time and I was wandering all over for it because I was looking in the wrong places and it was much nearer at hand than I thought.

Jesus says twice here in reference to being watchful or not being watchful. Be watchful in verse two. This is how you strengthen the things that remain.

Be watchful and remember how you received and heard. These are our senses of perception. You watch with your eyes, you receive and hear with your audibility sensors, your hearing.

He that has an ear to hear, let him hear. How did you receive and hear in the past that there wouldn't be any life at all if you had not received and heard at some point? Be watchful and if

you will not watch, middle of verse three, I will come upon you as a thief. You will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Think about this. I find this fascinating. What do you think about this? If you will not watch, I'm going to come upon you like a thief and you won't know the hour of my coming and I will come upon you.

It doesn't say the hour I come in the sky or the hour I appear on the earth or when I implement the kingdom. I will come like a thief upon you and you won't know when I'm coming. This is a negative promise.

If you're not watchful, you are going to be unhappily surprised and this surprise is going to involve loss the way a thief comes at an hour when someone is not watching and you suffer loss. What is the flip side of this? What if they are watchful? What if they do remember how they received and heard? What's the flip side of this promise? Think about it. If you are watchful, if you remember how you received and heard, the coming of the Lord Jesus will not be a surprise.

You'll have an idea of the hour. Now, the key here is, is this the hour of the rapture or the hour of the second coming? It is the hour when the Lord Jesus comes to evaluate us and I think more than saying, well, you'll know the hour of the rapture, you will know that the hour of evaluation is coming and you'll be ready. We know that our evaluation will take place at death or the rapture and so we will not be surprised to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus immediately upon death or immediately after the rapture.

It isn't going to overtake us and because we know it's coming and it's a reality for us and we remember how we received and heard and we are watchful, that time of evaluation by the Lord Jesus standing in his presence is not going to result in an unhappy surprise and loss. Makes sense? What an opportunity to be forewarned and forearmed, to be ready. It won't be a pop quiz that we haven't studied for, it will be a scheduled exam that we have prepared for and we are well-equipped and we're looking forward to shining and excelling and showing the fruit of our efforts in learning and reviewing and studying.

Anybody that's had any time in the academic world knows the difference between facing an assignment or an examination or a quiz and being prepared or unprepared. When you are really prepared, you're kind of glad the thing is coming. I'm going to put down everything I know, I will certainly pass, maybe I will even excel and we can move on to something else where if you show up unprepared, you missed the last class, you didn't talk to anybody, they announced an exam, you didn't find out, you show up, all right everybody, put your stuff away, I'm handing out this exam and your heart sinks below floor level, you know you're going to fail and you suffer loss.

So the church in Sardis, you have a name that you are alive, this is your reputation, you are thought of as someone who has got a spiritual life but you actually don't. Your fruitfulness, your effectiveness, your usefulness to God, it's the ways of death. You think what you're doing is a

good idea or maybe you haven't really thought about it at all, turn around, start thinking, be watchful, remember what you've received and heard so that the day doesn't come upon you as a thief and you don't know what hour I will come upon you.

Come upon you is not talking about coming upon the world or coming upon the church, this is when it is our turn for evaluation, I know your works. Verse four, you have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy. It's somewhat discouraging when he says even in Sardis.

In the Lord's mind, while Sardis may have a name of a life, lively church, a church of life, it's actually dead and Jesus says, even in this dead church, you have a few names, there is a faithful few scattered in this largely dead church. You think about those few, they've stuck it out even though they are surrounded by those who are spiritually dead and dying in terms of their activity, their fruitfulness, they are saved, these are my servants that Jesus is talking to but in terms of fruitfulness, they're dead branches. Even in Sardis, you have a few names who have not defiled their garment.

Why does he say you have a few people or you have a few souls or you have a few persons, you have a few men, you have a few believers. Why is it names? We're going to see that there are several repeated themes that weave a fabric, a tapestry throughout these letters and I'm sure you have already begun to notice that the concept of things being white, white stone, white garments, they'll walk with me in white. This occurs across the letters.

Name. I will write upon them my new name, I'll write the name of the new Jerusalem, I'll write the name of my God. You have a name.

We'll see this even when we get further on here. There's going to be other themes and I'll give you something of a list and we can look at the interrelationships because there is both formal structure here in terms of chiasm and this chiasm is itself made up of two mini chiasms, one before Thyatira and one after with Smyrna at the center of the first one and Philadelphia at the center of the second one. The two churches that have essentially no negative criticism are at the center of each of these mini chiasms and then Thyatira that's massively criticized is in the center of the larger chiasm and then at the outer ends, you have Ephesus that is commended for some things but has lost its first love and then you have Laodicea which is probably given the worst evaluation in terms of what it thinks it is versus what it actually is but names are something to watch for.

You have a name, you have that you are alive but you are dead, that was verse one but you have names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy. Would this be a wonderful experience when the Lord Jesus comes upon us for evaluation and he says, you're worthy. We are gonna see the song sung about the lamb who is worthy.

Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive glory and honor and so on. For the worthy Christ to

judge us worthy is almost unimaginable but he says, they will walk with me in white for they are worthy. The walking of the Lord Jesus, where have we seen this in the past? Remember Jesus was in the midst of the seven lampstands and then when you get to the church in Ephesus, he walks in the midst of the golden lampstands.

Well, if he's walking in the midst of the lampstands, these who are worthy will walk with him. Wherever it is he walks, if he's walking amongst the lampstands, if he is, we don't have many references to him walking elsewhere in Revelation except among the lampstands. And as he walks and evaluates, these who walk with him in white will also have perception and understanding and the ability to discern, not to judge.

Judgment belongs to the Lord but discernment to be able to see where things have gone wrong and to avoid it ourselves, to walk with him. And as he observes things, we get the idea that this information represented by the hidden manna in some ways will be shared and we will see things the way the Lord Jesus sees them. What an honor, what a privilege, what an opportunity.

So verse five, he who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments. You find themes being emphasized in each of the churches. In Ephesus, it was love.

In Smyrna, it was suffering. In Pergamos, it was false teaching, those who hold these false doctrines. In Thyatira, it was allowing the propagation of that false teaching.

They rejected it and repudiated it in Ephesus. By the time you get to Thyatira in the center of the chiasm, they are tolerating it and in some cases, evidently celebrating it and committing fornication with it and so on. Then you come to Sardis here and it is about cleansed garments.

They have not defiled their garments, these who are worthy. They will walk with me in white. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out his name from the book of life.

We saw the tree of life in the overcomer promised Ephesus. We know that there is a river of life that will be coming up. Now we have the book of life first mentioned in this book of revelation.

The book of life, I will not blot out his name from the book of life, but I will confess his name. How many times have we seen the word name here? You have a name that you're alive, but you're dead. You have a few names that are not defiled their garments.

I will not blot his name out from the book of life. I will confess his name before my father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Our name, God has magnified his word, even above his name, which is his reputation, his history of actions, what is known about him to the angels and to the human race. Don't take the name of the Lord, your God in vain. Don't claim his name.

Don't claim to belong to him and to serve him and worship him and believe in him and then do

abominable things, negative things. The name is who someone is, what they have done. What is their character? What is their record? What is their history? So I will not blot out his name from the book of life, but I will confess his name before my father and before his angels.

The Lord Jesus, if we are overcomers in this area, will claim us as his own. Confess our name. Remember that the white stone in verse 17 of the last chapter, talking to Pergamos, give the hidden manna to eat.

I will give him a white stone. This idea of what is white being pure, reflecting righteousness with no corruption, no defilement. On the stone, a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it.

So important to observe these consciously crafted and carefully constructed links, connections between these letters. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This is now the pattern beginning at the center of the chiasm in Thyatira.

This comes last. This concludes each letter. The first three, this exhortation precedes the overcomer promise.

From now on, it will follow the overcomer promise. And when we conclude our survey of the seven churches, we will see if we can figure out why. One of the reasons is to give us an idea that there is structure here.

So be watchful, strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. Your works are not found complete. Your works don't reflect maturity before my God.

And not only is Jesus evaluating these works, but these works are visible and known to the Father. Notice that the works are in the purview of the Father and he doesn't find them suitable. They're deficient.

If it's not perfect, if it's not mature, if it's not complete, it's deficient. Your works are deficient when they should not be. Now, if they are deficient, this is a reflection that something happened with what they received and heard.

It didn't get turned into application. What is our application? Looking at the letter to Sardis. First of all, you can find a meaning for every other church name here.

Philadelphia, philos is sort of being a fan of something, being friendly towards something. It's not agree, but philos means I'm in favor of this. I like it, I am friendly toward it.

And adelphoi is brethren. So feel adelphoi is having a positive and receptive attitude toward the brethren. Brotherly love, it is often called.

Philadelphia city of brotherly love. Smyrna comes from myrrh and we understand the connection in terms of suffering and so on. Sardis, this was a stone that was in the breastplate of the high priest, but it's very difficult to parse what these stones actually were.

In some cases, we don't know exactly which stone is referenced. There is some notion that some of these may have new names now, like diamonds may have been reflected with a different name, rubies and so on. But Sardis, nobody knows what the Sardis or Sardius stone was.

It has a name, but the name has no tangible meaning at this point. There's some suggestion that maybe it was red, but it really, nobody can figure out. There's all kinds of conjectures, but even in the name of the church, Sardis, they have a name, but the name doesn't mean much.

And name is repeated over and over again in this letter. What does that tell us? When you think of Sardis, how are we evaluated? What is our name in the eyes of the Lord Jesus? Do we have a reputation for consistency, for faithfulness, for dedication? This is different. You think about love and foremost love, putting the things of God first in our lives.

You think of being equipped to endure under pressure, suffering, persecution, hardship in Smyrna. You think about not tolerating false teaching or false teachers when you get to Pergamos. And if you fail to address it in the Pergamos phase, you end up in Thyatira where now there are, you're gonna be thrown into the bed with Jezebel and suffer her fate.

So there is kind of a downward drift from first of all, losing motivation. Then there is hardship and then you have Pergamos and then you have Thyatira. Now, Sardis, you're dead.

How are we going to emerge from this? Well, this brings us to the next church, which is Philadelphia in chapter three, verse seven. So rather than posthold for long in Sardis, we'll move on after the break to Philadelphia. And we're going to see when we look at these letters as a group, which they are intended by the Lord Jesus to be viewed as a group.

He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to all of these churches, plural. You look at them as a group. Well, we'll endeavor to do the same.

We wanna heed the exhortation of the Lord Jesus and get the benefit of it. And we'll continue that effort after the break.