

Him Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars  
Revelation 3:1-6

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

As we’ve seen, each letter written to the churches here in Revelation 2 and 3 begins with a description of Jesus tailored to the church’s need. Jesus is telling us something about the specific situation of each church by the description of Himself given at the beginning of each letter. He’s helping us understand better what He is saying to each church. Our text today, in v. 1, begins with **And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.** We know the seven stars represent the 7 angels of the 7 churches because Jesus explicitly told us so in v. 20 of chapter 1. God provides for His church in a myriad of ways, one of which is assigning angels to them to provide spiritual help and assistance. He’s reminding us of that here. Don’t forget, church, there are things going on that you can’t see, protections and provisions that you can easily be unaware of. Trust me. Look to me. Don’t forget about me.

The 7 spirits of God pushes this even further. While there is debate as to the exact meaning of these 7 spirits, a simple reading of the Bible would indicate that this is speaking of the Holy Spirit himself. 7 is the number of completeness in the Bible. It doesn’t have to refer to 7 different spirits, but rather to the one complete Holy Spirit. 7 churches were chosen to send letters to, not because they were the only 7 churches in the area who needed a letter, but because it also conveys a sense of completeness – the number 7 carries that intended affect. Isaiah 11:1-2 gives evidence to this interpretation of the 7 spirits referring to the Holy Spirit himself. **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.** Is that description of 7 things not a perfect representation of the Holy Spirit himself? Those 7 words do not completely encompass all that the Holy Spirit does, but they are intended to convey a completeness, a concise and “perfect” description of the Holy Spirit. I believe the Holy Spirit is whom Jesus is referring to with the description of Himself.

He’s telling the church in Sardis, pay attention to the unseen spiritual world that is actually more real than the physical world. Angels watching over churches. The Holy Spirit doing the work of the Holy Spirit. Given that, this word is one that we need to pay close attention to today. We are terribly prone to focusing on the physical at the expense of the spiritual. We live in the here and now. We live relatively comfortable lives that rarely push us to rely on this unseen world. When we get sick, we take medicine. When we think of possible future trouble, we purchase insurance. When we want to know what the weather will do, we look at the forecast. When we face a situation that causes us to get behind on our bills, we hunker down and find a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> job. When we have friends in need, we use our logic and experience to guide them in ways that we feel will better their situation. But do we pray? Do we think of the Holy Spirit, or the angel assigned to our church? As sinners, we don’t, at least not to the extent that we should. I believe that’s the central message

we are to take from this letter to the church at Sardis. And I believe there are at least 4 implications that arise out of this text for us to consider.

**First, We can appear alive but actually be dead.** V. 1. **I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.** This is deeply sobering. Let's not move too quickly over it. The church in Sardis was not without works. It was a dead church, but it was not without works. And the works have earned a reputation in the surrounding region – a reputation of being strong and alive. The problem can be seen clearly in v. 2. **I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.** The works are evident, but they aren't complete – not in God's eyes.

Anyone who loves God quickly asks, "Ok, well what makes a work complete in God's eyes?" Surveying similar verses and passages in the Bible reveals a distinct phrase that appears over and over to denote an incomplete work – "not with a whole heart." When we do works, but do not do them with a whole heart, those works are not complete in God's eyes. Many of the kings and judges of the OT were described this way – 2 Chronicles 25:2 – **And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart.** They followed the Lord, but not completely. They tore down some of the idols and altars, but not all of them. Their works were not complete in the eyes of the Lord. In the NT, Jesus describes the same situation in different terms. Matthew 6:24 – **No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.** It's a divided heart, not a whole heart. Part of the heart is serving the Lord, part of it is serving money. But God doesn't accept partial service. If your heart is not fully devoted to Him, it's not devoted to Him at all. An incomplete work is not a work at all. He didn't commend the church at Sardis for trying, he said they were dead. And, in v. 3, **If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.** This is not a small accusation. It's all encompassing. If your works aren't complete, you are dead, and I will judge you.

This language reminds us of a verse in Hebrews. Hebrews 11:6 – **And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.** The central reason behind a divided heart is a lack of faith. Why didn't the kings and judges of the OT completely tear down the altars and sacred idols? Fear of reprisal. Fear of the people revolting. Lack of faith in God to take care of them for doing what's right. As Jesus referred to in Matthew, why do our hearts get divided between God and money in our loyalties? Lack of faith that God can take care of us. Fear of earthly struggle that the lack of money can bring. Fear that God's reward will not be good enough. We as sinners struggle to have faith. God understands that. But He's reminding us in this letter to Sardis that it's a staggeringly serious thing. Don't take it lightly. There's a point where you lack of faith signifies that you are dead. Without life. Living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and are by nature children of wrath. If you aren't exercising faith, you are dead. That's a present tense "exercising." If you aren't exercising your faith, you are dead. We can't point to a faith of yesterday, or last year, or 20 years ago, when we decided to follow Christ. If that faith is not being exercised now, it isn't faith. It's dead.

**A second implication that arises out of that is this – To be alive is to exercise faith.** V. 2. **Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die.** Jesus is urging them to exercise their faith. Stop sitting around and dying. Wake up. Strengthen what remains and is about to die, namely your faith. How do we strengthen it? The Bible only provides 3 ways for us to do so. 1) Ask Him for faith. Pray for it, like the disciples did. "God, increase my faith." 2) Receive encouragement from other brothers and sisters. Paul says in Romans 1:12 – **that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.** Jesus tells Peter in Luke 22:32 – **strengthen your brothers.** Paul tells the church in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 – **as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may**

see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? Fellowshiping together, pushing one another, encouraging one another, strengthens our faith. 3) Experience testing and struggle. 1 Peter 1:6-7 – **In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** Rejoice. Your faith is growing. It's being tested and growing.

That's it. Ask for more faith. Encourage your brothers and sisters in the faith. Experience testing and struggle. That's how our faith grows. If you are alive, you will do those things. You will actively strengthen your faith in those ways. Many times the testing and struggle will be brought upon yourself because you want your faith to grow. You will give of your time and money in a sacrificial way to the point that your life is tested and you need God to come through for you – all because you want your faith to grow. You will stand firm in the face of the world trying to push you to conform and go along with sin to the point that you lose your job – all because you want your faith to grow. You will be open to God's call on your family to move to another country and culture that pushes you and grows your faith, even to the point of risking your life, all because you want your faith to grow. You will test yourself by going to minister in areas that are considered unsafe by the world, like Nutbush and Mexico, because you are alive and you want your faith to grow. You want to know that you are alive and not dead. So you will do things to test your own faith, things that require you to ask God for more faith, and things that require you to be around your brothers and sisters to receive encouragement and be strengthened. To be alive is to exercise faith.

**A third implication – to not live by faith is to soil your garments.** V. 4. **Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.** Not everyone in Sardis is dead. Some have not soiled their garments because they are living by faith. Notice what that means. Soiling our garments is not necessarily the evil, obvious sins that we may think it is. Rather, simply to not live by faith is to soil our garments. Brothers and sisters, I fear we need to pay close attention to this. I fear we need to not too quickly assume we are not soiling our garments.

Romans 14:23. **For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.** If our lives do not proceed from faith, we are sinning, we are soiling our garments, and we will not walk with Him in white, because we are not worthy. There is a direct correlation here. And we must remember that this faith is not the faith of yesteryear when we were “saved.” This is a daily exercising of, pressing ourselves into, faith. Regardless of what they world considers to be “soiling our garments.” Regardless of what traditional Christianity has determined “soiling our garments” to mean, the message of Jesus here is that anyone who is not consistently exercising their faith in their lives is living in sin. I think we all need to consider that this morning.

It is frighteningly easy for us to not trust God but to live life in our own strength. To not need faith. One of the main ways we do this is to only attempt things that we can do ourselves. We make budgets based upon the money we know we can bring in. We start ministries that we have a high degree of confidence we can make successful. We go to minister in areas where we can reasonably secure our safety. We give according to our budget because we know to go outside of that would remove our control over our own lives. In short, we are prone to removing the need for faith by ministering in ways that we have a high degree of control over. And that not only greatly limits the extent of our ministry, it is also, according to God, a soiling of our garments.

Another way we do this is by praying only for what we feel is reasonably possible. I need to confess before you that I have struggled a lot with this in recent months. It's one thing to attempt things that only I can do. It's another entirely to be afraid to even pray for things that seem impossible because of what people

might say if it doesn't come to pass. And I have noticed my prayers are limited by my fear of what men will say if God doesn't answer that prayer in the way I have asked. That type of prayer does not proceed from faith, and thus it is sin. And when it is brought to my attention, and I don't repent over it, I am soiling my garments and cannot have confidence that I will walk with Him in white. If my life does not proceed from faith, on a daily basis, consistently time after time, where does my confidence come from that He will confess my before His Father?

A fourth and final implication of this letter – to live by faith is the rejoice in the power of God. V. 5. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Only the one who conquers will be thus clothed and thus confessed before God. As a reminder of how we conquer, Revelation 12:11 – And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. We conquer by faith. By loving not our lives even unto death. By exercising our faith and not protecting our lives at all costs.

A few verses in 2 Timothy speak to this as well. Speaking of the last days, Paul lists many of the sins that people will commit. It's a laundry list of things that we would all reject and speak against. But the interesting phrase comes at the end of the list. Read with me. 2 Timothy 3:4-5. For people will be ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. When I see the phrase "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," I think about faith. That phrase literally means we don't have faith in what God says is pleasurable. We think we know better. So we live lives dedicated to what we think makes us happy, to our understanding of pleasure. And that makes me tremble. Because I do that. It's one of the main reasons I don't exercise my faith, for fear of losing what I consider to be pleasurable. I don't think that phrase is meant to point out the sensualized, sexual idea of pleasure. I believe it refers to normal, everyday, source of happiness. Does it proceed from faith, faith in what God says is pleasurable, namely dying to myself and living to Him? Or is it rooted in my own idea of what will make me happy?

The second phrase in v. 5 springs out from that – having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. People all over our country are living lives that appear godly, but actually deny the power of godliness – the very power that proceeds from faith. There is a deep power that comes when we exercise our faith. And it only comes when we exercise our faith. When we step out in a godly way and do the things that God asks us to do, things we know we can't do, that only He can do. Only then can we actually see Him do those things. Only then do we know the power that works in us to do that which only He can do. Only then do we know the Spirit of God (the 7 spirits of God) and the angels that He has entrusted to our churches (the 7 stars) are working for us. Only then do we get to see his power.

I believe this passage evokes in me a healthy fear. To what extent am I living with the appearance of godliness but have no need for His power. I don't need His power because I am not exercising my faith. And thus I'm not rejoicing in the power of God. If I'm not rejoicing in the power of God, I'm not conquering. You see, we can't conquer. We have not the power to conquer. We can only conquer through faith, through faith in the son of God. And if we aren't exercising that faith, we are dead. Just like those in the church at Sardis.

I am not proposing that we are all dead. I am encouraging us to check if we have ears to hear. Do we want to exhibit the power of God more? Are we content with the mere appearance of godliness, or do we desire to experience the power of God? Do we feel our works are complete in the sight of God? Are we vibrant and alive in our spiritual walk, or do we tend to appear more alive than we really are?

We must press ourselves to live more by faith! We must encourage one another to live more by faith.