



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 3:1-6 Revelation

Revelation

“Easygoing Evangelicals”

TRANSCRIPT

This morning, we're continuing our study in the book of Revelation. We're in chapter 3 at the very beginning, and we're going to look at verses 1 through 6. Revelation 3:1-6.

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

‘He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: “I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and 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.” ’ ’ ’ May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time together, this great privilege to join with the saints on a Sunday morning and worship to You in singing hymns of praise and reading the Scriptures and considering the meaning of the text that we have before us and considering the greatness of our Savior and all that He's done for us. We do that this morning. We seek to do it every Sunday morning and we do it particularly remembering our Lord's birth this time of the year, a great blessing that has been brought into this world, that You sent Your Son into a fallen world to save a lost race and He has done that. He accomplished that great work on the cross.

And yet, this is not something we just think about during a season of the year. It's something that should be on our minds every day of the year, and be a cause of great joy and rejoicing, that we who were lost have been found, that we who were spiritually dead have been

given life, and not just life, but we have been given eternal life. We have been made sons, and daughters, and heirs of Yours, and we are in your family and are going to reign as kings and priests. What amazing blessings we have in Christ because you loved a fallen world and your Son willingly came to die in our place and redeem us. We give You the praise, and the thanks, and we pray that our time of study together will bring us into a deep appreciation of all that He’s done for us, all that He is presently doing for us, all that He will yet do for us when He comes again.

And may we be awake and may we be watching as the Lord tells the church of Sardis that they’re to be doing. Help us to be that kind of people, alert, and anticipating His coming, and not only that, but His presence. Because we’re reminded in this book that He walks among the golden lamp stands, that He moves among the churches, that He’s here with us, He’s present with us now. May we sense His presence and may it be His ministry that guides us and blesses us this morning. We pray Your blessing upon us in that way. We pray that You’d build us up on the faith as we study, and we pray that we would be given the eyes to see and the ears to hear that we’re called to have, and that we would not only see our Lord in His glory, but we would also see the failures in our own lives and resolve to correct them, and also receive the encouragement that’s here in this great text of Scripture.

So bless us in a spiritual way, Father, and bless us materially, as well. We are dependent upon You for all that we have, the material things of life. We give You the praise and the thanks that You provide for us so abundantly, and yet we do pass through difficult times. There are numerous individuals in our assembly that are going through particular affliction, and we pray for them. We pray for Your healing mercy. We pray for Your grace. We pray for those who are going through a variety of difficulties. Bless them and give them a sense of Your presence. Give them a sense of Your care. Help them to know that You are in absolute control of the events of life and they could look to You and lean upon You and know that You’ll never forsake us. You bless us and You have a good purpose in every affliction of life. We give You the praise and the thanks for that.

And we pray for others, Father, outside of our assembly. And Father, we pray for our nation as a whole, that You would bless it. Bless our government. Give wisdom to those who You have appointed over us, and bless Your church wherever it meets, in this city and throughout the land, and throughout this world. May Your people be built up in the faith this morning and be drawn close to You. May that be the case for us. Prepare our hearts for a time of worship together. We pray in Christ’s name, Amen.

We’ve all heard the expression “rich as Croesus.” It refers to someone who is fabulously wealthy and comes from the legendary king Croesus, who was famous for his great wealth. He was

a real king and the capital of Croesus’ kingdom was the city of Sardis. And it is to the church of that city that Christ addresses the fifth of his seven letters. Like its legendary king, Sardis was a rich city. It was a commercial city like so many of these seven cities of Asia. And it was located in a very propitious place for business. It was located at the junction of five roads, one of those roads being the great king’s highway, which went to Persia. So it opened up the riches of the east to this city and proved to be very advantageous in business for the people of Sardis. So the city prospered, prospered greatly and became known not only for its prosperity, but for its luxury and loose living.

Well, as we’ve studied these letters, we’ve noticed that very often the seven churches in the seven cities reflect the character of the city in which they’re located. And the church of Sardis was no different. It very likely being in a prosperous city was a very prosperous church, which is a blessing. Prosperity, wealth, health, that’s all a blessing from God and we should be thankful for it. But wealth is like any blessing. It can become a curse if it’s not received properly. Agur, at the end of the book of Proverbs recognized that in Proverbs 30:7-9, he prayed for two things. He prayed that he not be in want and as a result of that steal, and he prayed that he not be full and deny the Lord.

Being full, having plenty, being rich can lead to spiritual indifference. Not always, of course. In fact, very oftentimes the church has been greatly blessed by the prosperity that God has given to people and it’s been used greatly in His service. But that was the problem in the church of Sardis. They had become enamored of wealth and the world around them, and so the Lord had some severe words for them.

This is the first church of the seven to which the Lord does not give a commendation, does not give a word of praise. He has praise for a few in the church, but not for the church. It was full of soft Christians who seemed to be Christians in name only. The church thought that it was alive. It thought that it was well. When it really was on the brink of death. It enjoyed prosperity without persecution. It experienced peace without the problem of heresy. Sardis was a pagan city. Its chief religion was the worship of Cybil. But there’s no mention of external conflict with the pagans or internal struggles with a Jezebel or the Nicolaitans. It was a church that enjoyed peace and prosperity. It was a church of what we might call “easygoing evangelicals,” people who professed faith but fit very comfortably into the world.

It was, as one writer put it, “a church content with mediocrity. It lacked the enthusiasm to entertain heresy and the zeal to provoke hostility.” Christians of Sardis were spiritually indifferent and asleep. So the Lord tells them to wake up or disaster would suddenly overtake them. That happened to the city of Sardis. In fact, it happened to the city twice: first when the Persians

captured it and later when the Greeks captured it. And both times it happened in the same way, by surprise attack. Sardis was never conquered by a frontal attack. It was built on a high hill that towered over the Hermos valley and was surrounded by cliffs that made it at least seem to be impregnable.

The people of Sardis thought it was impregnable. They were confident in their security, and in fact so confident that they left the city’s strongest point unguarded. So when the Persians attacked after laying siege to the city, they found a crevice in the face of the wall of one of the sides of this great hill, and they worked their way up that crevice and easily entered the city at that very secure place, the place that was left undefended, where they weren’t watching. Well, the result was king Croesus went to sleep one evening in command of a city. When he work up, the Persians possessed it and all that he had was lost. His riches and fortress were no protection from that calamity. History repeated itself three centuries later when the Greeks captured it in the same way.

This pattern of neglect and careless confidence made Sardis a proverb in the ancient world, a proverb for overconfidence and sudden disaster. And the church there showed the same character as that city. It was confident and comfortable. So the Lord’s words, “I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour,” were words that must have been alarming to the people of Sardis, the Christians there.

This fifth letter is the Lord’s wake up call to that sleeping church of Sardis, and we can say that it’s a wakeup call to every one of us. We all need to hear the words that the Lord has for that church. It begins, as the others do, with a majestic description of Christ that’s taken from that glorious vision of Him in chapter 1. Here He is described as having the seven Spirits and the seven stars. The seven Spirits is a reference to the Holy Spirit in His seven-fold ministry or His manifold ministries and powers. The One through whom the Lord ministers to the churches. He blesses us. He ministers to us through the mighty power and the various ways and wisdoms of the Holy Spirit, and He holds Him in His hand. It’s a description that suggests Christ’s sovereignty over the spiritual life of His churches and the spiritual life of His people within them.

He is sovereign. He is the Shepherd of the sheep. And that’s certainly suggested here. And what it also suggested is the only way to recover from spiritual lapsing, a lack of spiritual power and indolence of the kind that we see here is to look to Him. He’s the only source and solution to that problem. He holds the seven stars. He directs the Holy Spirit. And He holds the churches. He gives them the Spirit. And we have the sense of that in this description of having the seven stars in His hand. That is a representation of the angels over each church, but by extension, it’s the church that they are overseeing, as well. So He speaks not only of having the Spirit under His power, He

speaks of having the churches in His power. They are in His hand. We are in Him. So again, as I say, the only solution to such problems as are described here are by looking to Christ, seeking His help in time of need. And those in Sardis were in desperate need for the Spirit’s ministry, and the Lord was offering it here. He holds the church in His hand. It’s still His church and He cared for it. That’s the reason He alerts it to its peril.

The Lord says, “I know your deeds.” They had deeds. The church was known for its good works. It was known for being active. “You have a name that you are alive.” So they had a reputation. They were known as an active church. They were known as being alive. That was their reputation. But He knows the reality. He knows the heart behind the deeds. He knows that while the church appears to be alive and that the church is very active, it is really dead. That’s His pronouncement. “You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

Now, in verse 2, He speaks of things about to die. So the idea here is that they are on the brink of death. They are as good as dead for all of their religious activity. They met weekly. They observed the ordinances weekly. We would assume they observed the Lord’s supper every Sunday. That was the pattern of the early church. They took the Lord’s supper. They baptized. They heard sermons every Sunday. They were a prosperous church so we would assume they filled the offering plate as it was passed. They did things. They did the right things. But there was nothing really there, no vitality, no real interest in Christ or walking with Him. They were content with mediocrity and they thought they were fine. They thought all was well. You think you’re alive, but you’re really dead.

**Leon Morris** wrote “no condemnation could be sharper.” Well, that’s what the Lord had to say about this church of Sardis so many centuries ago. I wonder what the Lord would say today as He looks at the evangelical, Bible-professing church in America. David Wells, who is professor of systematic theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary wrote a series of books – three books, actually – in the 1990s in which He evaluated the evangelical church. The title of the first book that he wrote gives a clear sense of the problem, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* And the answer is it’s been neglected and largely it’s gone away. Evangelicals today are largely ignorant of what they believe or what they should believe. They’re ignorant of it because they’re not interested in theology, in doctrine, in knowing God.

Early in the book, Dr. Wells wrote that the work of pastors has been redefined, and this is his quote, “such that theology has become an embarrassing encumbrance.” In other words, people don’t want to hear it. And so if someone gets into a theological discourse of some kind, the eyes of the audience kind of glaze over and the preacher is a bit embarrassed about these deep things that he

may be preaching. And so it’s not taught from the pulpit. It’s been defined out of his responsibility, and Wells writes, “many in the church have now turned in upon themselves and substituted for the knowledge of God a search for the knowledge of self.”

Now that’s what Dr. Wells is saying. And I’m relying upon his observation and his study of the situation. I don’t think that things have improved in the first decade of the 21st century from the last decade of the 20th century. Sermons are preached to felt needs. Worship is designed to give people a lift. Now a sermon out of the Scriptures should address the needs that we have, and I believe that if one preaches through the Scriptures consistently that needs will be met – all of our needs will be met – over time. We’ll have the word that we need. And there’s nothing wrong with being lifted by worship. In fact, we should be. We’re emotional people. That’s part of our makeup naturally. We have feelings and they should be stirred through worship. There’s nothing wrong with that. But if worship is designed to boost that, and that’s the end, then it seems to me that’s rather artificial. It ought to well up naturally from a deep understanding of the things of God. And yet, there seems to be according to the things that the professor has written, very little interest in those things, in knowing who God is and what His plan and purpose are. The knowledge of God is largely being lost.

Now, the knowledge of God, of course, is not an end in itself. It is a means to the end, and that end is knowing God personally, walking with Him daily. But we can’t walk with someone we know little about. So what we must do is learn about the Lord. We must think deeply upon Him. And yet, again, going back to the question, what must the Lord think of a church that doesn’t do that? What must He think of a church that has very little interest in His truth and of Christians whose interest is in knowing themselves, not Him? Churches today are full of activity and lots of deeds, lots of programs. You can drive down the street by the number of large churches in this city and they’ll have a marquee advertising their programs, programs designed for specific groups of people, and that’s fine as far as it goes.

But is that activity, are those programs, are the things that are done done to glorify God or to satisfy self? The irony in that is that when we seek to satisfy ourselves, we really starve ourselves. It’s only by seeking the Lord that we really prosper and build a reliable foundation for our lives. It is by knowing His Word and through knowing Him that over time we become like Him. That’s a lifelong process of diligent consistent study of God’s Word that changes our character and strengthens our character over time and makes us fit for life and able to be calm in a crisis and capable of enduring trials, and in fact prospering in them.

Now I think most of you would probably acknowledge and agree with everything I’ve just said. But what about ourselves? What does the Lord think of us here at Believer’s Chapel? Do we have it all together to put a positive slant to what our Lord will say in verse 2? Are our works, our deeds completed? Well, the doors are open every Sunday morning, every Sunday evening, 52 Sundays of the year. They’re open. We gather on Wednesday nights. We have deeds. Do they please God? What does He see in our hearts? Now that problem is not only for those in the pew, it’s for those in the pulpit or the lectern, as well. It’s so easy for a teacher or a preacher to get into a routine of study and activity, and to some extent that’s necessary if you’ve got a schedule to keep. Every Sunday morning you’re expecting a sermon. You come on Wednesday night, you expect a lesson. That takes a routine. You have to be in a disciplined routine to do that. Every teacher knows that and that’s proper, but if it’s just a routine, well, that’s deadly.

It has always been a problem that people confuse activity with reality. And when I say “reality,” I mean spiritual reality, what is behind the activity. And that spiritual reality is the heart. It has to do with knowing and loving the Lord. That’s what He looks for. He searches the hearts. He patrols the churches. He’s here. I think we’re to understand the statements in Revelation chapter 1 and chapter 2 of the first verse of chapter 2, the Lord is walking among the seven golden lamp stands as direct application to this church to say He’s here with us now. We should sense that. And He patrols the churches and searches the hearts.

He did in Sardis and what He found there was not good. In verse 2, He exposes them and says, “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.” They’d started well, started quite well, but they had grown indifferent to the Lord. They had become enamored of the world and were what many call nominal Christians. “You are dead,” Christ said. I don’t know when this church started. No one does. But I’ve suggested this about some of the other churches in this area of Asia that it happened when Paul was preaching the gospel in Ephesus and we read in Acts chapter 19 that all of Asia heard the gospel and responded to it. There was a great revival. It was a great moment in the apostles’ ministry. And it seems that many of these seven churches, maybe all of them, were established through that great ministry of the apostle Paul and they began with great enthusiasm. But the problem we have is our enthusiasm wanes. It dies out.

I was thinking about this this morning. In fact, it was as I was teaching through this in the first service that this quote came to mind. It’s a quote that Dr. Johnson cited years ago in one of his sermons. He was in England and he was reading one of the British papers, and he quoted a journalist who was describing the churches in England at that time, and you go through the English countryside and you’ll see this little village or this clump of trees and this spire sticking out, very

picturesque. Many of those churches arose out of the Great Awakening through the great preaching of Whitfield and the Wesleys. And it was just as that title describes it, a Great Awakening, great revival and great enthusiasm. And this writer described those churches, which are now dead, as being like so many extinct volcanoes. Once upon a time, there was great life, great fire, and now it’s all extinguished.

Well, that’s the problem we face. We all face that. Churches face that, but churches are people, and we face it individually. That was the problem here. They had started well, but they’d grown indifferent. And now He says, “You are dead.” Years ago when I was a second year seminary student – this must have been 35 years ago – J.I. Packer spoke, delivered a series of lectures at the school. And during one of them, he called the modern church “moribund.” I thought, “What is that?” And you all know what that word is, I know. But back then, I didn’t know what it was. So I thought, “Moribund? It doesn’t sound good.” And so I went home, and I got out my dictionary, and I looked up the word. That’s how you learn new words. You go to the dictionary and you look them up. And it means “dying,” from the Latin word *mori*, “to die.” It’s not quite dead, but it’s coming to an end.

Now that’s the church of Sardis, the moribund church dying out. They had begun well, but they turned aside and they were now stuck in the world and were increasingly conforming to it. They were a dying church. But the Lord cared for this church. He loved it and He speaks to it in verses 2 and 3. And that’s the only hope for this church through the Lord speaking to it, through the Word of God, because only the Word of God ministered by the Spirit of God can revive the dying. He begins, “Wake up.” This is the first of five imperatives, five commands that He gives. “Wake up, strengthen the things that remain, remember what you have received, keep *it*, –” and then fifthly “– repent.”

But first, “Wake up.” Now that’s better translated, “Be watchful,” or, “Be watching.” And those words must have had a sting to the people there in Sardis because of the history of their city, which as I have said earlier twice fell to enemies due to a failure to be watchful, to be on guard, to be alert. A lack of spiritual vigilance, is what He’s saying to these Christians there, is costly. So wake up or be watchful. Now that expression is used in two ways. Paul used it of watching out for danger and keeping watch over the soul, being spiritually alert. But it’s also used by the Lord of watching for His return. And those who love the Lord long for His coming and look for it, anticipate it.

Later in 16:15 the Lord says, “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake,” or “blessed is the one who is watching.” The Lord says that in verse 3, only here it’s



not a blessing, it’s not encouragement, but a warning. “I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.” Now the thief in Scripture is proverbial for unexpectedness. The Persians and the Greeks both entered the city unexpectedly, secretly like thieves, and the Lord will come like that. He comes presently like that. He warned the Ephesians in the first of the seven letters that if they didn’t remember from where they had fallen and repent then He would come and He would remove their lamp stand.

He comes to churches and He comes in discipline. So we must be prepared. We must be watchful. We must be alert and awake. That’s the meaning here. It’s a visitation the church would bring on itself if it didn’t repent. That would distinguish it from the Lord’s second coming and being alert about that because the second coming will happen whether we’re prepared for it or not. So the wise live spiritually circumspect lives. They live careful lives. They guard against spiritual apathy. They are always watching, watching for present dangers, watching for the influences that surround them in the world, watching also for the Lord’s return. And they’re continually remembering. After telling them to strengthen the things that remain, strengthen the residue of spiritual vitality.

And I think you can think of that as being like the dying embers in person’s heart. It’s like we all begin with an enthusiasm for the Lord. We’ve come upon this great understanding of things. We’ve come to know the Lord. We love Him. We’re grateful for the salvation we’ve received and our heart is like a log that’s burning and blazing, but logs die out and enthusiasm dies out, and this is though, when he says, “Strengthen the things that remain,” He’s saying, “Rekindle the sparks that are still there. Fan those coals into a flame of fire again.”

But after saying that, He then tells them, “Remember what you have received and heard.” That instruction is grammatically in the present tense, and that has the sense of continually remembering. We are always to be looking forward to the Lord’s next coming. We are always to be looking back to His first coming and remembering what He did for us. We cannot reflect upon these things enough. We cannot reflect upon what’s coming and the glory that’s coming enough. We cannot reflect upon His atonement enough. We should never fail to recall these things. Never fail – to use Isaiah’s exhortation in Isaiah 51:1 – to remember the “pit from which we were digged.” Remember our origin and what God saved us from. It is so important to be remembering. We must be firmly grounded in the great doctrines of Scripture. Remember these things. “Keep *them*,” He says, “and repent.” Turn from apathy, self-satisfaction, self-indulgence, worldliness, and return to Christ and devotion to Him.

The biblical person that I think best represents this church of Sardis is Lot, worldly Lot. He went from pitching his tents toward Sodom to sitting in the gates of Sodom. He began well, leaving Ur of the Chaldees with Abraham, his uncle, but his growth had been arrested and he was like a dead man. He wasn’t dead. But he was like one. We know there was life in him because Peter calls him “righteous Lot.” And yet, he did not have that appearance, and so the Lord sent His angels to rescue him. Judgment was coming on that wicked city and the angels told him and his family to leave the city. “Escape for your life,” they say. There’s a great urgency in that. They were to turn their backs on Sodom and not look back. And that’s a good picture of repentance, turning away from and not looking back. We do look back. That’s why I think repentance is a daily, constant process that we go through. We’re continually to be repenting of the things that we do. But that gives us a picture of what it means.

Well, when Lot tried to warn his friends, his sons-in-law of the danger that was coming, you remember what they did. They heard his earnest exhortation to leave and to flee the city, and they laughed at it. That’s what the world does with the news of judgment. It mocks it. It laughs at it. But in addition to that natural inclination for the man of the world to reject the things of God, Lot had so compromised his testimony in the city, he had become so like Sodom that they couldn’t take him seriously when he spoke of spiritual things. They thought he was joking.

Sardis was like that. Not everyone, though. Not all had become secularized. There was a remnant of faithful vital believers there, and the Lord encourages them in verse 4. “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” They were not stained by the world. When people walk carelessly along the street, they pick up the mud, and the dirt, and the stains of the street. And Christians who are careless in the world get soiled by the world. Not these people. They kept their witness pure. And the promise given to them is they will walk with Christ in white. That’s been given various interpretations from the promise of robes of purity, to festal robes, to robes of victory, and all of those are possibilities. But probably the white robes signify justification. I think the context supports that. Verse 5 promises that their names will not be erased “from the book of life.” So this is a promise that has to do with salvation.

These faithful believers are called worthy. “They will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” That doesn’t mean that they earned their salvation, that they became worthy of their justification, that they merited it in some way, that’s an impossibility. Justification is a gift of God. But this is a way of saying that they have been faithful. They have withstood the pressures to

conform to the world, those strong pressures which were in that very wealthy materialistic city. They’ve not compromised their witness.

But having said that, as you read through these verses, these last two verses of the text, particularly in verse 5, you might wonder, can we then, having received justification as a gift, forfeit it, lose it? I say we might wonder that because you read these verses and we read about the possibility it seems of begin removed from the book of life. He says, “He who overcomes – ” that is the true believer. “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Does this imply that it’s possible for a person’s name to be written into the book of life and then later erased? No. And in fact, just the opposite.

This is the explicit assurance that it won’t be erased. It is another guarantee that the believer cannot lose his or her salvation. That’s what the Lord said. “I will not erase his name.” It’s the same grammatical construction that you find in John 10:28, “they will never perish.” I hold them in My hand. The Father holds My hand, or My hand is held in the Father’s hand. No one can pluck them out of My hand. They will never perish. And it is constructed in a double negative that puts emphasis on the point. And the idea is they shall by no means ever perish. And here, that same idea is to be understood. They shall by no means ever be erased.

Now, all of the ancient cities, and this seems to be in the background of the statement, they had what’s called a civic register, that is a book in which the names of all the citizens were recorded. God has such a book. It’s the book of life and it contains the names of all the saints. And later we’ll come to 17:8, and there we understand by implication, at least, that the names of those whose names are in the book of life have been written there “from the foundation of the world,” from all eternity. Now the assurance that the Lord is giving here is that they will never lose their citizenship in God’s heavenly city. He reinforces His assurance to the believer here by saying, “I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” And the Father certainly won’t refuse the words of His Son, the requests and the confessions of His Son.

That’s security. That’s what this is about. And security, eternal security, absolute security is the anchor of our soul. It is what gives us great confidence in the trials of life. Genuine believers certainly stumble along the way and certainly do get entangled in the world, just like Lot, just like these Christians in Sardis. It’s common. It happens. And so we must ask ourselves, “Are we doing that? Has that happened to us? Are we settling into the world?” Maybe we all need to wake up. Maybe we all need to repent. And the quickest way to doing that is by remembering, remembering all that the Lord has done for us by dying for us and saving us from a terrible judgment to come and

reflecting on all that He is doing for us presently as our great high priest, interceding for us, guiding us through the Holy Spirit and through providence, and all that He will yet do for us when He comes again, reflecting on all of that.

The Lord is speaking to us here. This isn’t merely a message to an ancient church. This is a message to the churches all over Asia and all through history, and to us, as well. Those who are truly His hear His voice and respond to it. He’s the one who holds the seven stars, holds the churches in His right hand, and He’s the one who holds the seven spirits, the Holy Spirit in His left hand. And when we look to Christ, to borrow from John Stott, it’s as though He brings His hands together, the Spirit with the churches, or the Holy Spirit with the believer. And through the ministry of the Spirit, that powerful ministry, He changes us. Only the Lord can do that. What we need to do is look to Him. Always be looking to Him for help.

Great lesson of this text for us is don’t be self-satisfied. Don’t be neglectful. Don’t be apathetic. Guard yourself from complacency and worldliness. Wake up, remember, and repent, and be watching. That’s the first imperative. Watching for present dangers, watching out for one another so that we can strengthen one another and encourage one another. And also be watching for the Lord, for His soon coming, which is the great theme of this book. That’s our hope. We should be remembering and watching. We should be a remembering people and a watching people.

Winslow Homer is one of the great American artists. He lived mostly in Maine in the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Living in Maine, he painted mostly scenes of the sea, and students of his paintings have noticed a very common theme in much of his work, that of people, men and women, young and old, standing on the shore, sitting on the rocks, looking out to sea, searching the horizon for a ship bringing a loved one. One of his paintings is “Dad’s Coming!” of a boy on the shore waiting for his father’s return. Another is “On the Cliff,” pictures a group of women standing on a cliff looking out to sea, looking for their husbands. It was a very common sight on the seacoasts, where life was hard, life was full of uncertainties. People were waiting and watching for their loved ones to come home.

Well, they were not at all certain that they would come home, but we have the certainty that Christ, our loved one, is coming, and looking for Him should be the theme of our lives. We look for those that we love. So we should be looking for His future return. That’s our great hope, as I said. But not just that, not just looking for His future coming, but looking for His visit daily, seeking Him, walking with Him, living in fellowship with the Lord. He walks among the seven golden lamp stands. Does He walk with you? With me? These are questions that we need to ask and we

need to be looking for Him every day in order to walk with Him. Those who do are not dead, but alive.

But there may be some here this morning that are not alive, in fact, are truly dead. You’re here. You have some deeds. You came. You arrived. You sat down quietly, reverently. You stood twice to sing hymns. Those are deeds. You’re doing things. But are they deeds with any reality to them? Is there any power in them? Or is it a form of godliness without power? If you’re not a believer in Jesus Christ, there’s no reality there. You need to wake up. You need to come to life. You need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the moment you do, at that very moment, you’re saved. You’re given a white robe, a robe of imputed righteousness. You’re made a child of God, a son, a daughter, an heir of God with a glorious future and a wonderful present because the Lord is in the present now with you and watching over you. May God help you to do that, to look to Him. And may each of us desire to walk with Him daily and serve Him faithfully. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for the warnings and the exhortations we have here to this church of Sardis. May we not think ourselves above the conduct and the condition and the character of this church because we’re not. This is a message to all churches. How easy it is to become just easygoing, fit in the world, conform to the environment in which we live. Help us not to do that. Help us to walk with You and to desire to do that. Bless us with that blessing we pray, in Christ’s name, Amen.