

Revelation 3:1-6 *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ²Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. ⁴ Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ⁶Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

What would Jesus write about us? If he were to evaluate our congregation of believers, look closely at every heart and examine the activity present here, what would Jesus write about us? Would he commend us for the activity and work we carry out in his name? Or would he have some criticism that he would need to warn us about? Would he speak gently to us in praise of what we do or would his tone be more blunt and to the point to wake us up and cause us alarm so that we would change what we are doing to more align with what he would want of us?

Our text for today is one of 7 letters written to 7 churches in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. Each letter was written by Jesus and personalized to the individual congregation. In each letter, Jesus shows his personal concern for each congregation of believers as well as the pastor who served there. Some he praised for the good things which he saw. Some, like the congregation in Sardis addressed in our text, he warned of the spiritual dangers which confronted them which they weren't even aware of. This text before us gives us the opportunity over the next few minutes to take a closer look at our congregation. We have the chance to do a spiritual wellness exam on ourselves to see if there are areas we might improve as we continue to gather together and to work for our Savior. These types of exams can be painful as we are made aware of challenges or issues that we might find. Honesty is the best policy and we may not like what we find when we look. But these types of exams and exercises are extremely beneficial because they allow us to deal with the problems and change our course if necessary to be in line with God's expectations of us as his people. Let's spend a few minutes today pondering the question: ***What Would Jesus Write about Us?***

The job of the church is simple: to preach the Gospel (the good news about Jesus) in its truth and purity and to administer the sacraments according to the way Christ instituted them. The church's job isn't to be involved in social or political activism. Though some help for those in need may be a natural outcome and response to the Gospel message taking root and expressing itself in the lives of God's people, it is not the church's main responsibility to bring about social or political change. God's church is to be about the work of proclaiming the Gospel to strengthen faith and guide the lives of those who already believe in Jesus and to reach out to bring to faith those who do not yet know him. That's it! This is what God wants to see in his church. He wants it to be a light holding out the Gospel as a lampstand into our sin darkened world. And let's remember who the church is. I'm not talking about the church as an institution—meaning me and our leadership. I'm not talking about the church as a building where we gather together. The church is every single person who believes in Jesus as their Savior. The church is you. This is the work that you and every single believer in Jesus is to be about. We are to be actively involved in hearing God's Word and partaking of the Sacraments. The natural result of that is that we will be motivated by God's love to serve one another in love and be God's witnesses to our world. The natural fruit of faith that comes from growing in God's word is that we will all be active in carrying out God's mission of making disciples for him in our world. God doesn't just want activity in his church. He wants spiritual growth and activity which comes from faith and love in him. This is what God is looking for from his church. This is the standard by which he would make an evaluation of us and our ministry.

What God saw when he looked at the congregation of Sardis was a congregation that appeared to be very active and alive. They had a reputation of being very alive. Everyone from the area would have looked at them as a hopping place that they would want to emulate. Maybe they had an active worship attendance and enjoyed great fellowship together. Maybe they had no money problems and everything they did seemed to be successful. From the outside looking in, they looked great. Yet Jesus tells them very bluntly that this reputation was not earned. What looked to be alive and thriving on the outside was full of rot and spiritual decay on the inside. Jesus wrote: *I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.* Spiritually, something was fatally wrong. They were doing many good deeds, but these deeds were not complete. They were lacking something. In their zeal to take care of the needs of the body, they had neglected people's souls. They had lost their purpose. They became all about the outward activity and lost sight of their purpose to share Jesus and God's word with the people. They were more concerned with all their activity than they were about their own souls. The Gospel wasn't all that important to them anymore. They weren't sharing the gospel with one another to build themselves up, so they weren't that concerned about sharing it with others. They were priding themselves on all the good things they did on the outside, yet spiritually, inside they were rotting and decaying. Jesus didn't look at the outward things. He look at the heart—what is within—and he didn't like what he saw at all.

Every text that comes before us addresses some specific sin for us to watch out for. The specific sin which this text addresses in us and warns us about is spiritual apathy. Apathy is indifference for God and his Word. It is showing little or no concern about sin and doctrine. It is not caring about what we should be caring about the most—growing in God's Word so that we can be active in sharing that word to build each other up and to reach out so that more people can know about

God's love in Jesus. This work isn't just my work or the leadership's responsibility. This is what God wants every single believer to care about. God wants you not just to care about but to be active in pursuing with your life. Apathy might be seen in someone who doesn't see the need to be in God's house every week or reading his Word every day. It's the attitude that I'll be ok with how I am and don't need to always be concerned about this. Spiritual decay can be found in someone who doesn't see firstfruit giving as all that important but instead just throws God the scraps of what is left over at the end of the month. Spiritual indifference might display itself in not participating in the joint ministry that we carry out together but sitting to the side and letting everyone else take care of it for you. It might be seen in putting on the facade of regularly being at God's house but doing little to nothing else to display fruits of faith in your life. Apathy is not caring about doctrine or allowing those things which God calls sin to continue to exist among us. What would Jesus write about us?

Let's evaluate. Does the fact that our Bible Study only has 25 people/week out of 240 members and that we don't have any other studies other than our BIC class during the week because people to attend them suggest some spiritual indifference? Does the fact that our worship attendance this year is down on average 10 people/Sunday from last year and that only has 43% of our members are in attendance each week suggest some spiritual rotting? Does the fact that only a few people show up for our congregational meetings to be part of our joint work together and it can feel like pulling teeth to get people to step forward and serve/volunteer for ministry teams suggest some spiritual apathy toward the work God has given us to do? Does the fact that we have a list of more than 30 people who haven't been to worship in a year but few if any have missed them or reached out to contact them and invite them back suggest that perhaps we don't really care about their spiritual wellbeing? What would Jesus write about us? After his thorough exam of each of our hearts and lives and our lives collectively as a congregation, into which camp would Jesus put us? One to be praised or one to be warned?

This is something that a group of believers is to be concerned about. The ultimate warning Jesus issued in our text is this: *"But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."* Of course, he's talking here about judgment day and the condemnation those who are sleeping and apathetic will endure when they stand before Jesus. Why is all of this important? Because deeds without faith is hypocrisy. Faith without deeds is dead. Both will face God's eternal punishment of hell. God is that serious about what he wants from us as his people. He is that serious about sin and the lives which we live as his people. Faith in Jesus as our Savior and deeds which flow from love for God and faith in Jesus are what he looks for in his people. Anything less is deserving of God's punishment.

Ouch! That hurts! It's hard to hear that we may have been sleeping and slipping spiritually without even knowing it! But while it hurts to hear this and to come to this realization and see things we didn't want to see, we are thankful that Jesus is so blunt with us to rouse from our slumber. Now as we are aware of these issues we can repent of them, turn from them, be on guard against them and refocus our faith and deeds to follow what God wants for us. This is where we appreciate the reminder from Jesus: *"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent."* Remember how the Holy Spirit came to you through the waters of Holy Baptism to wash your sins away and make you a child of God. Remember how he first brought you to spiritual life and took all of your sins away. Remember what you heard and how thrilled you were when you first learned about the dying love of Jesus. Remember how relieved you were to hear that Jesus loved you so much he was willing to suffer hell so that you could be his forever. Remember how comforted you were to find out that you didn't have to do this or that to get into heaven because Jesus did it all for you. Remember that you were so thankful for all that Jesus did for you that you wanted to do everything he said in his commandments not to be saved but because you wanted to love him back. Remember what God has given to you in Jesus and hold fast to it.

Here's the awesome news: no matter what the past might be for you, no matter how much indifference or apathy or rot you have experienced in the past, it doesn't have to affect your future. Forgiveness with Jesus is a completely clean slate. Forgiveness means that you leave God's house today completely clean of your sin, clothed in white with your name written securely in the book of life. You leave here today completely forgiven, confident that Jesus will acknowledge you as his child before his Father and the angels when he comes on the last day. You leave here today completely free to be focused and active in the work that God has given you to do has his people. You can be on guard against the sleep of spiritual apathy and join the faithful that has been preserved and will be forever acknowledged before God. So go, and be about the work that God has given you. Re-energize yourself to be active and regular in reading God's Word at home and hearing God's word weekly at worship. Be recharged to grow in your faith so that you can be more active in sharing with others the joy of what Jesus has done for them. Be rejuvenated to be full of activity motivated by faith in using all that God has given you to carry out God's work aggressively.

What would Jesus write about us? I pray that he would see people motivated by faith and full of activity to carry out his work. I pray that he would see people who not only acknowledge but show by their actions that regular attendance at worship is important and essential for God's people. I pray that God would see people who sincerely desire to grow in their faith through the study of his word. I pray that God would see people participating together in the ministry God has given to us out of thanks for all that God has done and with a desire for others to connect with God and remain connected to him. What a great time of evaluation God has given us this morning as we ponder this question: What would Jesus write about us? Amen.