**Wake Up**

Revelation 3:1-6

Everyone knows how hard it can be to stay up late. I can’t remember the last time we made it to midnight on New Year’s Eve. Why bother, right? A ball drops in NYC… and who cares?

But ***sometimes you HAVE to stay up***. Your kids are out late, and you want to be sure they make it home safe. Someone is sick and in bed and you have to stay up to be sure the fever goes down.

And sometimes you are the one **on duty**, keeping watch over a military company in the field or in a fort. You take turns scanning your surroundings for any signs of danger, any sounds of enemies approaching.

If the sentry falls asleep, the whole company is in danger; the whole fort could be suddenly captured.

Jesus used this language of keeping watch, staying awake, over and over again. Especially regarding the end of the age. Matthew 24 is one of the key passages among Jesus’ teachings about the end times. Listen to how he starts that sermon:

“And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and they will lead many astray.’” Matthew 24:4-5

Our Lord’s opening words are a WARNING to not be led astray; to watch out for deception and false teaching. Jesus closes this section by talking about Noah and the flood. Just as people were going about their everyday lives and suddenly the flood swept over them and they died, “So will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

“Therefore, **stay awake**, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have **stayed awake** and would not have let his house be broken into.Therefore you also must **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Matthew 24:42-44

The flood. **The thief.** If criminals told you when they would be stopping by, you wound’t need a security system. But they tend not to be so courteous and generally show up completely unannounced. So rude. Jesus gave these warnings to his disciples right before his death. And he comes back to these ideas in the letter to Sardis.

“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.” Revelation 3:3

Now, a lot of Christians like Revelation 3:10 “I will keep you from the hour of testing.” But not as many have this verse memorized or posted on their wall. The language of Jesus coming like a thief HERE is not a warm fuzzy, “coming to save you” reference. ***It’s coming AGAINST you, coming upon you.*** This is not a comforting promise. This is an urgent warning.

And again, that is the whole tone of Matthew 24 and 25. **Warning. Warning**. Don’t fall asleep. Don’t be led astray. Watch out for false teachers. Watch out for your own selfishness and sin that would keep you from serving your Master and instead you start abusing His servants and indulging yourself.

Listen to how Matthew 24 ends.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 24:45-51

Strong enough for you?

This is the **coach’s halftime speech** where he is like, “WAKE UP!” Getcha head in the game. Focus. Do what we practiced. Remember your training. Work together. You get distracted, you’re out. You’re on the bench. You mess up bad enough, you’re off the team!

So with that happy introduction, let’s turn to Revelation 3 and the letter to Sardis. We will see **three parts** to this wake up call from King Jesus. First:

**Stay Alert:**

1. Recognize your spiritual **Condition** (dead / alive; weak / strong)

“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.” Revelation 3:1

Every one of the letters starts with a reference to the glory of Jesus. Here His divinity is highlighted as the one who HAS the seven spirits of God; or the seven-fold Spirit of God. ***The fullness of God is in Christ.*** He has it. He **is** the fullness of God.

If you have Jesus, **you have the fullness of God**. If you have seen Jesus you have seen God the Father. If you believe in Jesus, you are filled with His Spirit who gives you ALL of the glory and goodness and love and joy and and power of God.

No one else has the seven Spirits of God. No one else holds the seven stars which are the angels of the seven churches. No one else is presented in Scripture as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. No one else is called the Word who was with God and who WAS God. No one else is called the alpha and the omega, the author and the finisher.

***Only Jesus.***

This is the One who is writing to us and speaking to us today. Will we wake up enough to hear His words?

**Stay Alert:**

1. Recognize your spiritual **Condition** (dead / alive; weak / strong)

“I know your works. You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.”

Revelation 3:1

There will be an affirmation for this church, but it’s delayed two verses and is pretty minor. Apparently, most of the people in this church had gone astray, only a few remained faithful.

They had a **good reputation**. The other churches and other believers thought they were a pretty good church. Their potlucks had some of the best food. Their marketing team was on it. The publicity and social media were trending. But it was lipstick on a pig. It was makeup on a corpse.

Jesus saw through their shiny, positive exterior to the reality inside. And he didn’t like it.

Jesus reserved his most ferocious ***condemnation for HYPOCRITES***. They looked all spiritual and impressive. They quoted the Bible like nobody’s business. They dressed fancy with all the trappings of prayer and tradition. And they kept the rules - and made sure that other people did too.

But their ***hearts were far from God***. They cared much more what people thought of them than they did what God thought of them.

How relevant is this for the modern American church and ***the average churchgoing “Christian”?*** We all know how to look the part. We dress up and get the kids all dressed and make sure all the fighting and fussing stops in the car and we get out with smiles and happy faces so when the church people ask “How are you?” we can all say, “Wonderful! God is so good!” And then scowl at them as they walk by. “You happy dirtbag.”

Now, I know many of you are beyond that. If you’ve had a rough week and someone genuinely asks ***how you are doing you*** will pull them aside and honestly share what’s going on and ask them to pray for you. This is one of the healthy and wonderful things about our church. People really do care how you’re doing.

This is why we are committed to **small groups**. Those are designed to be places where you can safely open up about what is actually going on in your life. Sometimes Sunday morning is pretty rushed and you’re off to your next thing so you don’t want to open up and risk some tears. But in small group you have time and a place to be open and honest. Even more so in a small discipleship group where it’s just three or four of you and often you have similar challenges and struggles so you can relate to each other even more.

***What is your true spiritual condition?*** That has been a recurring theme in these letters. The words of Jesus really are a sharp, two edged sword that expose us for who we really are. He sees through our facade to the true condition of our hearts.

***Are you alive in Christ?*** Have you been born again? Have you been made new by committing yourself fully to Jesus by faith? ***Are you standing firm in Christ?*** Or have you lowered your defenses? ***Are you awake*** and alert or foggy and drifting? Have you been numbed into complacency by the distractions of this world? Hear this from the Lord Jesus:

**Stay Alert:**

1. Recognize your spiritual **Condition** (asleep / awake; incomplete / complete)

“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.” Revelation 3:2

Four descriptions that are all contrasts. Dead or alive. Weak or strong. Asleep or awake. Incomplete or complete. ***What is YOUR true condition?***

This is actually encouraging, I think – that ***the church there was not all dead but only MOSTLY DEAD.*** There were still places that were a little alive. There was hope. There was a chance to REVIVE what was there and awaken and strengthen the rest.

***This is why we pray for revival.*** Because there is always hope. God can stir up His people again, and strengthen what remains, even if it is about to die. It’s like the little plant in ET that represents the life of the alien. Initially wilted geraniums come to life as ET hums to them. But then as ET gets sick and is dying, the geraniums also wither up and start to die. But later, at the turning point of the movie, the little boy is told ET is dead, but he sees the geraniums and they are healthy and robust, so he knows ET is alive and well.

***How is the plant of YOUR LIFE?*** Is it healthy and growing or wilting and dying?

***How is your FAITH?*** Are you standing firm in the Lord Jesus even in the face of sorrow and suffering?

***How is your alertness?*** Are you wakeful and vigilant? Are you paying attention to the work of God in your life and in the world?

***How is your holiness?*** Are you actively protecting your purity and devotion to the Lord or have you lowered your defenses and allowed thorns to choke your love and weeds to grow up in your life?

So first of all, to stay alert, we have to realistically recognize our actual condition. No pulling punches. No holding back. Just ***ruthless honesty***. Where are you? Second:

**Stay Alert:**

1. Remember the **Gospel** and repent

“Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.” Revelation 3:3

We get sluggish and start drifting off to sleep spiritually when we lose track of the gospel message.

***WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?***

That is an immensely important question. How would YOU answer it?

Here’s a two option pop quiz:

**The Gospel:**

1. Jesus is Savior
2. Jesus is Lord

Now, I know you smart alecks in the room will quickly choose C - all of the above. And you’re right. But think about this for a minute. ***What is the primary GOSPEL message of most churches today?*** If you had to choose between these two, which would you say has become most prominent? Jesus is SAVIOR or Jesus is LORD?

This is a really clever strategy of the devil. Because it is completely true to say Jesus is Savior. It is true; just incomplete. We wrestled with this a year ago.

**The Popular Gospel:**

* **Receive** Jesus as your personal Savior so you go to heaven when you die

Again, all true. Wonderful. But is this a complete gospel message? Let’s compare it to Scripture.

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10

Wait a minute. I thought we confessed Jesus as Savior? I thought all we had to do was “receive Jesus” into our hearts? What is this about LORD?

**The Biblical Gospel:**

* **Surrender** your life to Jesus as Lord, believing He died for your sins and rose again

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

Savior and Lord are inseparable. You can’t have Jesus as Savior without committing to Him as Lord. It doesn’t work that way. And yes, there is one verse in John 1 that talks about “receiving Jesus” but there are 100 verses about following Jesus, taking up your cross, bowing the knee and calling on His Name.

Receive to us makes it seem like we are setting the terms. You are so graciously allowing Jesus to come into your life. That is totally backwards. ***We don’t receive Jesus. We beg Him to receive us.*** We fall on our faces before Him, pleading for forgiveness, grace and new life.

I think the best word for committing to Jesus in personal faith is **SURRENDER**. He is the King. He has all the power. We don’t negotiate, we capitulate.

Because yes Jesus is the Savior of the World. Hallelujah! But He is Savior BECAUSE He is LORD. ***If Jesus had only died on the cross*** he would be nobody’s savior. It is only because he rose from the dead, proving that He is the Son of God and Lord of heaven and earth that He is able to save anyone from sin and death.

People ask me sometimes ***why we don’t do more altar calls at Oakwood***. This is why. I worry that people will wrongly interpret what happens in an altar call. Can someone sincerely raise their hand or come forward in response to a public appeal? For sure. I probably responded to 20 or more through my teen years. At least one of those was real and maybe they all helped in different ways.

The problem is the word “JUST.” **Just** believe in Jesus. Just receive him. Just ask Jesus into your heart. Now, what they mean is - you can’t earn God’s favor. Your works are no good. You can’t add to the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Correct.

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

But true saving faith is **faith in Jesus as LORD**. It is commitment to Jesus to become YOUR LORD. It is surrender. It is a new beginning. A new birth. If you raise your hand or come forward one day and then go right back to what you were doing the day before then your response to that altar call was nothing. It was a lie. You were faking it. You were scared or emotionally stirred up or trying to impress someone else. But it wasn’t real.

Here’s how Jesus said it. And I challenge anyone to find a verse where Jesus says anything like, “Just receive me as your Savior and you’re good.” Here’s what Jesus did say:

**The Biblical Gospel:**

* **Surrender** your life to Jesus as Lord, believing He died for your sins and rose again

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.” Mark 8:34-35

***The call of Christ is the call to FOLLOW.*** To Obey. To turn around, repent. To live a different way. To rebuild your whole life in line with the teachings of Jesus. “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” Will we keep living our lives as we always have or will we turn to follow Jesus as Lord?

It’s not that obedience or good works save us. But they do show that we are saved. “Show me your faith apart from works and I will show you my faith BY WHAT I DO,” wrote James the brother of Jesus. Because “faith without works is dead.” It’s not real. It’s a lie.

So let’s look at the gospel here in this letter.

**Stay Alert:**

1. Remember the **Gospel** and repent

“Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.” Revelation 3:3

First, we see that the Gospel is a message that must be remembered and received. The gospel is a truth we receive. It is a WHAT. Jesus is a WHO. ***We receive the gospel trusting that Jesus will receive us into His kingdom.*** The gospel is also a lifestyle we KEEP that begins with repentance and is characterized by repentance from then on. Jesus gives us three wonderful gospel promises in this letter.

1. Remember the **Gospel** and repent
   1. Sanctification – being **Clothed** with the righteousness of Jesus and walking in His ways

“And they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” Revelation 3:4

Many of us would say, “this is out of order.” Justification comes first, then sanctification. But the truth is they come together. ***Justification must not be separated from sanctification*** just as Jesus as Savior cannot be separated from Jesus as Lord.

This promise is for those in Sardis who had not soiled their garments by giving in to sin and worldliness and immorality. Most in the church and the region had compromised and become polluted to the point that Jesus saw them as dead. But a few stood firm. A few resisted the corrupting influences of sin. And to those victorious ones Jesus promised everlasting white robes to symbolize their holiness and faithful ways. Notice here the promise is to WALK with Jesus, which in Greek as in English is about LIFESTYLE more than belief system.

1. Remember the **Gospel** and repent
   1. Justification - being **Counted** righteous by Jesus through faith in Him

“The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.” Revelation 3:5

First Jesus describes victorious believers as walking with Him in white, then he rewinds to the moment those white garments were received by faith. As soon as you call on Jesus to save you; as soon as you surrender your life to Him, ***He takes your sinful, soiled garments upon Himself and gives you His righteous perfection in return.*** It is the great exchange.

To be justified is to be declared righteous based on the performance of Jesus, not your own. Based on our own performance all of us would be pronounced guilty. But God is rich in mercy and offers us a way to escape justice and condemnation by being united with Christ.

That is how you get your name in the **Lamb’s book of life**: you belong to Him. He is yours and you are His. You have turned away from your old life, surrendering all you are to King Jesus, and He gives you a whole new life. ***You are born again IN CHRIST.*** You were dead IN SIN, but Jesus changes you on the inside and begins to grow His fruit in every part of your life.

1. Remember the **Gospel** and repent
   1. Identification - being **Confessed** as one with Jesus to God the Father

“I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” Revelation 3:5

Again, Jesus said this plainly in his earthly ministry. “Anyone who is ashamed of me before men, I will be ashamed of him before my Father.” That’s the rest of Mark 8 we were just reading.

This is why Paul opens the book of Romans with the bold declaration, ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”***

What about us? Are we bold and unashamed to be associated with Jesus? Or are we a little embarrassed? A little bashful about the one we supposedly call Lord?

This is why salvation begins with a **verbal, public CONFESSION**. You have to say out loud that Jesus is Lord. This is why baptism is the public seal on private faith: it shows you actually meant it when you raised your hand or walked forward in that meeting. Baptism is your visible sign that the old you died and was buried - going under water - and a new person rose to new life, united with Jesus.

1. **Remember the Gospel and Repent**
   1. Sanctification - being **Clothed** with the righteousness of Jesus and walking in His ways
   2. Justification - being **Counted** righteous by Jesus through faith in Him
   3. Identification - being **Confessed** as one with Jesus to God the Father

The gospel is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. ***It is so much MORE than just going to heaven when you die.*** It is experiencing heaven right now. It is being set free from slavery to sin and brought into a living relationship with the God of heaven. It is about being filled with the Spirit of God so He can begin to bear His fruit in and through you.

It is about justification, being counted righteous in Christ. But justification immediately begins the process of sanctification through which we increasingly live like Jesus, we walk in His ways. And as we confess the name of Jesus before others, we receive the promise from Him that one day he will confess our names before God the Father and all the angels. One more key to staying alert in these last days.

**Stay Alert:**

1. Resist the **Contaminating** effects of sin

“Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments.” Revelation 3:4

This was a sad church. This was a sad letter for Jesus to write. Most of the church-goers in Sardis had fallen asleep, had let their faith wither up and die, had compromised their holiness and soiled their clothes.

Still, ***there is always a remnant*** - a few people God preserves who are faithful to Him. And Sardis had a small remnant. A few names. All around them people were snoring. Some of them probably literally snoring. But most people just zoned out.

So how are your garments? ***Are you walking closely with Jesus?*** Are you pure in heart, seeking Jesus first and above all other things? Or have you become double-minded, loving Jesus but also this world, also yourself?

My point with the shallow popular gospel is that many people use it as an excuse to do whatever they want. Jesus is my Savior, so I can still drink and fool around and not read my Bible or pray. I don’t have to give 10% to the church or anything to charity. Who’s going to tell me otherwise? No legalism y’all!

Here is our summary today:

**Stay Alert:**

1. Recognize your spiritual **Condition**
2. Remember the **Gospel** and repent
3. Resist the **Contaminating** effects of sin

A lot of what these letters are for is diagnosis: exposing the true condition of our hearts. Where are you really with the Lord? Dead or alive? Asleep or awake? Weak or strong? Incomplete or complete?

Remember the **full Biblical gospel**. Yes, Jesus is our Savior. But He is also the Lord of all things and at the moment you trust in Jesus as Savior and commit to Him as Lord He begins to change you. Are you cooperating with that sanctifying process or resisting it?

***Are you actively fighting sin?*** Putting off the old nature and putting on the new self which is daily being renewed in Christ?

WAKE UP!

These warnings to wake up and pay attention would have reminded the early disciples of Matthew 24 and 25, so let’s close with **Matthew 25**. Three parables. The first is about ***10 young women who are waiting for a wedding party***. All ten fell asleep. But five of them had prepared in advance and had extra oil for their lamps. The other five had not prepared and ended up missing the whole wedding party because the groom said, “I don’t know who you are.”

“Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Matthew 25:11-13

Pay attention! Stay awake! The way you prepare is by settling your relationship with Jesus as LORD. Surrendering completely to Him.

The next parable is the talents. A wealthy man gives out large sums of money. A talent was 20 years worth of wages. So one guy got five talents or 100 years of wages. Another got two or 40 years of wages. And a third guy got one or 20 years of wages.

The ones with two and five talents immediately put that money to work for their master and it generated a return. The guy with one talent was scared and buried his bag of money in the ground. Understandably, when the master returned, he was none too pleased with that scaredy-cat. He took that talent and gave it to the most profitable worker.

“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 25:30

Then Jesus described **the final judgment**. One set of people made excuses for what they had FAILED TO DO. The other set of people was commended for what they had DONE. What was on the list of people Jesus was concerned about?

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Matthew 25:35-36

Basically: ***the poor. The weak. The vulnerable.*** The people we tend not to notice or think about. And what is Jesus saying? Whatever you did to the least of these you DID TO ME!

Jesus Himself identifies with the poor and hurting, the weak and wounded.

Brothers and sisters… ***are we awake and working?*** Or are we asleep and neglecting our duties? Are we sitting on our couches getting fat and streaming shows while the world goes to hell around us?

Let’s pray that the Lord would wake us all up!