

Wake up and Work

Revelation 3:1-6

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March 7-8, 2026

I enjoy hearing the names of various churches. Have you ever attended Bedside Baptist? Mattress Methodist? Our Lady of the Sheets? Pillow Presbyterian?

Would you become a member of a church with one of the following names?

- First Church of the Frozen Chosen
- The Hollow Hallelujah Assembly
- The Busy Baptist Church
- The Coma Congregation
- The Church of the Living Dead
- Community Church of the Zombies

If Sardis had a church sign out front, any one of those names would have fit. They thought they were the Church of “What’s Happening Now” with a full calendar, busy programs, and multiple ministries. But when Jesus visited, He didn’t see activity. Instead, He performed an autopsy and gave them a chilling report in Revelation 3:1: “...*I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*”

Here’s our main idea: *Wake up and work so your reputation reflects reality.*

1. Reflect. Jesus calls the church to reflect on who He is in verse 1: “*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....’*” The word “*angel*” refers either to an angel assigned to the church at Sardis, or to the pastor.

Sardis was known for its gold, jewelry, and dyed cloth and was a city of luxury and softness. Aesop, the famous writers of fables, was from Sardis. The original city sat on the top of a 1,500-foot-high plateau, which made the city nearly impenetrable by invading armies. Its seemingly indestructible location caused the inhabitants of Sardis to become overconfident and complacent, which led to their eventual downfall.

The church in Sardis is the only one of the seven churches with no mention of idolatry, immorality, or persecution, which probably led to it becoming spiritually soft and sleepy. This church didn't receive any commendation from Christ while receiving the most severe condemnation.

The phrase ***“seven spirits of God”*** is drawn from Revelation 1:4 and refers to the fullness and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. The seven-fold ministry of the Spirit is defined in Isaiah 11:2: ***“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.”*** The church at Sardis needed a fresh outpouring of the life-giving Spirit, because they were nearly dead.

After introducing Himself, Jesus declared, ***“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*** The word for ***“know”*** means, *“to see with perception”* and ***“works”*** refers to their labor in the Lord. The word ***“reputation”*** is also translated as, ***“name.”*** They believed the right things, and they behaved the right way, even meeting needs in the community. Vance Havner writes: *“It was a busy church with meetings every night, committees galore... something going on all the time. It had a reputation of being alive...”*

Even though they had the reputation of being alive on the outside, the reality was they were dead on the inside. Jesus placed his finger on the pulse of this church and pronounced it dead! The word ***“dead”*** is vivid as it refers to *“a corpse.”* One commentator captures it well: *“With His infallible knowledge, He pronounced the Sardis church dead. It was defiled by the world, marked by inward decay, and populated by unbelieving people playing church.”* Chuck Swindoll calls the church at Sardis *“a morgue with a steeple.”*

This makes me think of what Jesus said in Matthew 23:27-28: ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”*** 1 Timothy 5:6 says, ***“But she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.”*** Ron Ritchie writes, *“Just because you’re breathing doesn’t mean you’re living.”*

Someone once said, *“Ministries often begin with a man who has vision. That vision is captured by others and becomes a movement. As the movement gains followers and momentum, it becomes a machine. After a while, people forget about the vision and what was once a movement becomes nothing more than a*

monument to a glorious past.” I would add that some churches end up becoming museums, mortuaries, or mausoleums.

The church at Sardis had activity without vitality, form without fire, and structure without the Spirit. A contemporary poet described it this way:

*Outwardly splendid as of old,
Inwardly lifeless, dead and cold.
Her force and fire all spent and gone,
Like the dead moon, she still shines on.*

Our reputation is what people think we are, while our integrity is who we really are when only God is watching. Reputation is public perception; integrity is private reality. The church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but Jesus said they were spiritually dead. Brothers and sisters, don’t spend your life managing your reputation while neglecting your soul.

Speaking of reputation, we should be far more concerned with God’s reputation than with our own. Our lives either reflect well on Him or misrepresent Him to the watching world. I had the joy of praying with Vance Debruine’s 100-year-old mother shortly before she went home to be with the Lord. After she passed, Vance gave me something he found written in the pages of her Bible. It was just one short statement, but it says so much: *“God’s reputation is at stake in my life. I want to maintain it, not stain it.”*

What a way to live! Every word we speak, every decision we make, every hidden action when no one else is watching either maintains the reputation of God or stains it.

After calling us to reflect on who Jesus is, and assessing our spiritual condition, we’re given a series of short, staccato commands.

2. Revive. Jesus has not given up on this church. His first command is urgent and is found in verse 2: **“Wake up...”** The idea is to arise and pay attention. One translation renders it this way: *“Be thou watchful.”* They’re to wake up and watch out. Ephesians 5:14 says, **“Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”** Romans 13:11 calls us to **“wake from sleep.”** Jesus knows how to raise the dead because He is in the resurrection business and loves to recover, restore, and revitalize His church.

To “revive” means, “*to re-life, to live again, to flourish anew.*” Synonyms include “*renewing, repairing, restoring, and refreshing.*” Ray Pritchard says you revive something when you bring it back to life. Revival awakens the saved from a state of spiritual slumber. Here’s a more formal definition, “*Revival is the sovereign act of God, whereby He calls His backsliding people to repentance, faith, and new obedience to Him.*”

I like how another pastor puts it: “*We need an old-fashioned, heaven-sent, soul-saving, sin-erasing, devil-chasing, banner-waving, Christian-flaming, Holy Ghost-revival...from the pulpit to the pew...let’s have revival that starts with me and you!*”

This message to wake up would have resonated with the citizens of Sardis because on two occasions, they had let their guard down, and enemy soldiers scaled the cliffs at night and conquered the city. They thought they were secure but because they didn’t wake up and watch out, the city fell to their enemies.

Likewise, these Christians thought they were safe, but they were spiritually complacent. They thought they were alive, but in actuality, they were Christian corpses. They were a sleeping church in a city that fell asleep twice. 1 Peter 5:8 says, “***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***”

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3. Renew. After being revived, in verse 2, these believers were commanded to “***...strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.***” The word “***strengthen***” means to, “*fix firmly and stand fixed.*” The church was at the point of death, so the situation was extremely urgent. The phrase “***about to die***” literally means, “*knocking on death’s door.*” They still had work to do, and they needed to do it right away because they were headed to the mortuary.

A spark still flickered but it needed to be fanned into flame again. Brothers and sisters, until the Great Commission is completed, our work is not finished. Let’s ask the Lord to reignite our passion for the lost. I’m thrilled that over 40 people are going on mission trips this year and that so many of you have committed to give so they can go. I’m also eager to see how God will provide a Celebrate Recovery and Counseling pastor and a Young Adults pastor as we’re committed to

living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors, and among the nations.

We're calling the church to five focused times of prayer for these two pastoral positions.

Sunday, March 8, at 12:15 p.m. in the Life Center

Tuesday, March 10, at 6:00 p.m. in the Worship Center

Sunday, March 15, at 5:00 p.m. in the Student Center

Friday, March 20, at 5:30 p.m. in the Worship Center

Sunday, March 22, at 8:00 a.m. in the Student Center

4. Remember. Jesus called this church back to the gospel in verse 3: ***“Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it...”*** The word ***“remember”*** means, *“to recall, to mark, to set aside.”* In the Bible, ***“remembering”*** is not just bringing something back to mind; it implies a change of behavior, so our lives line up with what we've been reminded of. Remembering is not a passive attitude; it's proactive, which leads to action.

We're to ponder and then put into practice. We're called to remember so we can recalibrate our lives according to what's being remembered because we tend to forget God's faithfulness while neglecting our faith. In short, we need reminders to remember because if we don't, we'll rebel. We need to remember when the grace of the gospel was fresh. We need to remember who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He has saved us from. To ***“keep it,”*** means they were to *“watch attentively by keeping an eye on it, like a warden does.”* It's easy to slide from complacency into compromise and to drift from right doctrine into raw disobedience.

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5. Repent. Verse 3 ends with a call to repentance: ***“...and repent. If you will not wakeup, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”*** We know Jesus is coming again for His church, but this verse refers to Jesus coming with judgment upon this individual church. Like the fig tree of Mark 11:20 which had leaves but no fruit, this congregation was in danger of shriveling up and dying.

Speaking of the imminent return of Christ, I had the privilege of speaking at Mainspring this past Sunday night. Here's part of what I shared from the booklet I wrote called, "Ready or Not."

With all the events happening in the Middle East, we need to be ready for His return right now. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 21:28: ***"When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*** *The fact is we are closer to the return of Christ today than we were yesterday.*

Here's the question: Are you ready ... or not? *I pray God will shake us out of our spiritual slumber so we're ready for the coming of Christ, which will be sudden and unexpected.*

Friend, I won't beat around the bush. The consequences are too staggering, and the stakes are way too high. Let me say it as clearly as I can. If you have never repented and received Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, *you will be in deep trouble when Jesus comes back.* If you don't know Jesus, you have an appointment with judgment, and it will be *certain, swift, and severe.*

The closeness of Christ's coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.

There are extra copies of this free booklet available at the Café and the Welcome Center.

6. Reward. We this in verses 4-5: ***"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. 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."*** I love that there are ***"still a few names in Sardis,"*** a remnant that is totally committed to the risen Savior. No matter how dark the culture becomes or how compromised the majority appears, God always preserves a faithful few. The prophet Isaiah spoke during national decline but promised survival in Isaiah 10:21: ***"A remnant will return..."***

We're reminded that Jesus knows every name that names Him as Savior as we read in John 10:3: ***"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."***

There are three rewards listed for Christians who are conquering overcomers.

- **They will walk with Jesus and be clothed in white garments.** The reference to unsoiled “*garments*” would have caught their attention because Sardis was known for red garments. The word “*garments*” symbolized character in Scripture. The word “*soiled*” means “*filth or pollution.*” The word “*white*” means, “*shining, glittering, and dazzling.*” White garments were worn for festive occasions such as weddings. They also stood for purity and were worn to celebrate victory. Revelation 7:14 says, “***They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.***”
- **They will never be blotted out of the book of life.** In John’s day, rulers kept a register of each city’s citizens. Officials in Sardis were known to remove undesirable citizens from the city register of names. The risen and reigning Christ promises to never erase a true Christian’s name from the list. This is a strong double negative that can be translated, “*I will never, ever, under any circumstances blot their names from the book of life.*” This is a statement of absolute assurance of salvation. Those whom God saves He saves forever.

While some point to this verse as evidence you can lose your salvation, it is actually a very strong statement of eternal security, similar to what Jesus said in Luke 10:20: “***Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.***” The Book of Life is referenced six times in Revelation, including Revelation 20:15: “***And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***”

- **Jesus will confess their name before His Father and the angels.** Jesus said something similar in Luke 12:8: “***And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.***” One day, Jesus will usher His redeemed ones into the presence of the hosts of Heaven and say, “*This is one of mine! He was not ashamed of me, and I am not ashamed of him.*”

Jesus emphasized three times that these rewards are from Him. Listen to how personal this is.

- They will walk with **Me** in white (verse 4).

- I will never blot his name out of the book of life (verse 5).
- I will confess his name before my Father (verse 5).

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7. Response. Once again, we're encouraged to listen carefully to the Holy Spirit in verse 6: ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** This message was not just for Sardis; it is for every church, and for every individual.

I spent some time this week pondering this question: Would Jesus describe Edgewood as alive, or merely active? Would He say we are dead or devoted? I could be wrong, but I think He would say that because of the Holy Spirit's work, and all to His glory, our church is alive and active! Here is some evidence of life that comes to mind.

- This week, while serving as a mentor in Youth Hope's Move Outreach, a man came up to me out the blue and said, *“Edgewood is alive because your parking lots are always full.”* I'm not sure that alone is an indicator of life, but it does show how hungry people are for God's Word.
- We're a church committed to evangelism. One example would be our ministry at the Rock Island County Jail. Bruce Peters estimates that between 45-60 men have prayed to receive Christ in the last six years.
- When I spoke at Mainspring, our ministry to young adults, I found them to be attentive and eager to obey. After I challenged them to make giving a habit when they are young, one Augie student handed me an offering envelope with cash in it. Another member of Mainspring fully surrendered to Christ. BTW, in my recent prayer walk at Augie, I was reminded that there are 500 international students just one mile away and prayed that we'd be able to reach them with the gospel as God brings a new pastor to lead this group.
- In anticipation of God bringing a Celebrate Recovery and Counseling Pastor, Pastor Daniel has been providing pastoral leadership for Celebrate Recovery. I've also been attending CR on a regular basis. About a month ago, I met a guy who said he needed to repent. He was saved the next week. I received a text this week from an Edgewood member who invited someone to CR, *“He told me that he finally decided to check out CR last Friday. He was so impressed with how friendly people were and that he was able to get a free Bible. He also said there was a woman there that was like his second*

mom and was able to connect with her. He wants to talk more with me about it and said he is planning to go back.”

- Over ten people have signed up to be baptized in two weeks. That reminds me of what Jim and Sybil Eberhard shared about what happened in Kenya this past fall. Jim was asked to come and teach a new church how to get organized. Let’s listen to him tell what God did: *“We determined the first step was to see who was born again and biblically baptized. After meeting and talking one by one through the whole congregation, there was one who needed to be saved and 25 needed to be baptized. After Bible study on Sunday morning, the whole church marched 30 minutes down to the river. [We] baptized 25 including the 89-year-old man in the picture. When we returned, the church agreed to follow the constitution they had adopted, they prayed together, the WORD was preached, and the church was organized and ready to move forward. Praise the Lord! Our ministry of establishing new and stabilizing existing churches continues!”*

I wonder how many believers here have not been baptized yet? I’m sure there’s at least 25 in each service. There’s still time to get baptized in two weeks. I’m also certain there are people here who have not been saved...yet.

BTW, Beth and I are leading the Edgewood Kenya team in July. We’ll be partnering with Bobby and Lisa Bechtel in Mombasa. When the rest of the team heads back, Beth and I will fly to Nairobi to spend time with Edgewood Go Team Partners Jim and Sybil Eberhard, and Jerry Novak.

There’s a lot more evidence of the Spirit’s life-giving work at Edgewood. But as I was thinking and praying about this, it hit me that no church wants to admit it might be dying. No one wants to join the First Church of the Living Dead. No congregation wants to die but doctrinal drift, subtle compromise, gradual decline, and death happen so quietly that we could coast on past momentum or current activity, without realizing that life has ebbed away. It takes place in a church when it substitutes busyness for brokenness, programs for power, reputation for repentance, tradition for transformation, liberal theology for biblical love, progressivism for prayer, wokeness for worship.

The church that thinks it’s doing well may be in the greatest danger. The assembly that believes it’s impregnable may be closest to collapse. The congregation that has experienced powerful movements of God in the past may be in the greatest danger of coasting in the present because spiritual success can become a spiritual sedative.

That's why 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns: ***“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”*** Our greatest danger is not weakness; it's self-confidence.

C. S. Lewis captured this truth with piercing clarity: *“Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done.”* Yesterday's obedience doesn't fuel today's faithfulness. Last year's revival doesn't guarantee vitality tomorrow. In Exodus 16, fresh manna fell every morning. It couldn't be stored or stockpiled. If you tried to live off yesterday's provision, it rotted. We must be renewed daily. *Wake up and work so your reputation reflects reality.*

I know that some of you have experienced the sadness of seeing a church close, not because of doctrinal failure or loss of faith, but because of circumstances that were simply beyond your control. You may have been part of a congregation where people loved the Lord, cared for one another, and tried to remain faithful, yet the challenges became overwhelming. Sometimes financial pressures, demographic shifts, health issues, or other realities made it impossible to keep the doors open. That kind of loss is deeply painful because it was your spiritual family, filled with memories of baptisms, prayers, worship, and friendships that mattered.

If this is part of your story, please know that we feel the weight of this grief with you. Faithfulness is never wasted in the eyes of God. Even when a church closes, the love, service, prayers, and witness of those who were part of it are remembered by the Lord who sees every act of faithfulness. You did not fail because a building closed. You were faithful in the place where God had you.

You are welcome here, and your story matters. Our prayer is that you would find encouragement, healing, and hope in Christ as you continue worshiping, walking, and working together with His people.

The question must become personal. Am I spiritually alive? Are you?

If we will reflect, revive, renew, remember, and repent, Jesus promises to restore and reward us.

I heard about a pastor who once stood before his congregation and made a startling announcement: *“Next Sunday, I will be preaching the funeral of this church.”* The room went silent.

Attendance surged the next week and every seat was taken. The platform was draped in black and a casket sat at the front of the sanctuary. The pastor stepped into the pulpit and read from Revelation 3: ***“You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead...Wake up.”*** He preached about spiritual drift and activity without intimacy, religion without repentance, reputation without reality.

Then he invited the members to come forward to pay their respects by looking inside the casket. One by one, people walked down the aisle and leaned over to peer into the casket.

Inside was a mirror and each person saw only one face. Their own. Here’s a sobering truth: Revival begins in the heart of the person in the mirror.

The pastor continued, *“Jesus does not just conduct funerals. He raises the dead. The same voice that said, ‘Lazarus, come out,’ is the voice that says, ‘Wake up.’ The same Savior who confronted Sardis walked out of His own tomb. And He still brings dead people to life.”*

Some of you are asleep spiritually. You have religion, but not a relationship. You may have a reputation of being alive, but you have never been born again. Today, you don’t need better rituals or a new routine. You need a rebirth and a resurrection.

The Bible says we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Since corpses cannot revive themselves, they must be raised. And Jesus alone raises the dead. Repent of your sins and turn from your self-reliance. Put your trust fully in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Call on Him and ask Him to save you.

Because one day there will be a funeral for you, unless the rapture happens first. And on that day, reputation will not matter. Attendance will not matter. Church membership will not matter. Only one question will matter: Are you alive in Christ?

If you are not sure, settle it today because Jesus still raises the dead. And revival can begin right now. With the person in the mirror.

Would you join First Church of the Frozen Chosen? The Hollow Hallelujah Assembly? The Busy Baptist Church? The Coma Congregation? The Church of the Living Dead? Community Church of the Zombies?

Probably not. Because deep down, we don't want to belong to something dead. We want to be part of something alive.

In reality, the name on the church sign doesn't matter nearly as much as the condition of the hearts inside the building. If you want to become alive right now, pray this prayer with me.

Invitation Prayer

India Commissioning

New Member Introduction

10:45 – Toni Poston