

Introduction: When I was growing up in the 1960s the vast majority of people knew what happened on Palm Sunday and the seven days that followed. Today the forty five percent plus of people born after 1983 might not know. So, I will give a brief summary of what happened on Palm Sunday and the week that followed. *** Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey with people praising Him and spreading palms before His donkey. They were anticipating being set free from Roman dominance by The King God had sent to them. Many people were recalling a prophecy given through Zechariah with the following highlights: Rejoice greatly ... your king is coming to you ... endowed with salvation ... mounted on a donkey ... His dominion will be ... to the ends of the earth ... [Yahweh Sabaoth] will defend [Judah and Ephraim, the divided Israelite people] ... they will devour and trample ... their God will save them in that day (*Zechariah 9:9-17*). *** As is typical of humans, they forgot what came later in Zechariah's prophecy: They will look on Me whom they have pierced and they will mourn (*Zechariah 12:10-14*); in that day a fountain will be opened ... for sin and for impurity (*Zechariah 13:1*). *** It was only after the terrible shock of the death of Jesus, The Savior, on a Roman cross on Friday, in which many who rejoiced on 'Palm Sunday' had cooperated in His death, that they experienced the depths of mourning they could never have imagined. It was only after the Good News of His Resurrection on the eighth day of Holy Week was heard and experienced by His disciples that their mourning was turned to true joy. *** But today, lest we consider ourselves, as Christians and 'good church people', to be better than the Jews in Jesus' day, we will be spending some time in a letter The Glorified Jesus gave to the last surviving apostle John for a church in western Asia Minor, just east of northern Greece. Jesus did this some six decades after the birth of His Church. His people were now living their way, NOT God's Way. *** Jesus had strong words for His people who had forgotten The Gospel and were asleep in His Kingdom. These words are not just for them, but for us. So let's open our hearts and minds to Him.

I. Jesus tells His people: I know your good reputation, but you have fallen asleep and you are not obeying God, so wake up and repent. (Verses 1-3)

A. He says through The Holy Spirit: I know your name for being alive and doing good works, but you are dead. (*Verse 1*)

1. Jesus has a message for the leader of the church in Sardis. (*Verse 1a*)

Messenger: He literally addresses the 'messenger'. Most likely this is the head elder, or pastor.

Sardis: Sardis was located in what is today western Turkey. It had been conquered in 549 BC by Cyrus of Persia.

Then in 218 BC it was conquered again by Antiochus the Great (father of the evil Antiochus Epiphanes) from Macedonia (northern Greece). Both times the citizens may have been too wrapped up in commerce and pleasure to be on guard against foreign attack. Sardis was advanced in industrial arts and manufacturing. They also perfected the purifying of gold and silver and became very wealthy. An extremely large Temple to Artemis, the Greek goddess of fertility was there.

2. The One having the seven spirits of God (Jesus) says: I know your works and you name for being alive. (*Verse 1c-d*)

3. But, you are dead. (*Verses 1e*)

B. Be waking up, remember what you have heard and of which you taken hold, and repent. (*Verses 2-3*)

1. Be always waking up and alert. (*Verse 2a*)

Learn from history: Sardis' secular history was one of always being conquered by enemies because they were only focused on what they were doing. Jesus says, now you are My people, you need to be awake and alert to the danger of compromising your faithful relationship to Me by making commerce and wealth your focus.

2. Strengthen the things that remain, which have been about to die for a long time. (*Verse 2b*)

Wake up or die: Putting it together, they must wake up and put Jesus first in their lives. If they allow their hearts to be weighed down by the cares of this life the day (of judgment) may suddenly trap them. So, they must be alert and praying. (*Luke 21:34-36*) They must not let sin conquer His Church.

Let us wake up and not die

3. Because I have NOT found your works being complete before the face of My God. (*Verses 2c-d*)

Ch.I.N.O.s: Jesus is accusing them of being 'Christ-followers in name only'. Or to follow our current acronyms:

Ch.I.N.O.'s! They needed to ask, and **we** need to ask, are our works and deeds done from a motive of love for God, and not selfish gain? Paul wrote to the churches in Corinth that if he prophesied with all knowledge, had faith to see miracles, gave fully of his possessions to the poor, and even laid down his life – but he did not do this from love, he gained nothing (he had lost everything). (*1 Corinthians 13:1-3*) So, all our works of faith must be built on a humble, dependent faith because we love God for all He has so graciously given us in His LOVE, personified in The Savior-King.

4. Therefore, remember that of which you have taken hold and heard. (*Verse 3a*)

Gospel: They received The Savior by The Holy Spirit given them when they took hold of Gospel Truth: Christ died for our sins according to what was written, and rose on the third day. (*1 Corinthians 15:1-7*) So, may we all understand and embrace The Cross on which Jesus died five days later. We must first die to our sins to share in His Resurrection on the eighth day, counting Palm Sunday.

5. Guard and repent. (*Verse 3b*)

Grow in Christ-likeness: God works all things so His children will be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

(*Romans 8:28-30*) And, those who had been 'earthly', but now belong to Christ by faith, will also bear His likeness.

(*1 Corinthians 15:15-49*) Having the hope of The Gospel, people are being transformed into His likeness by The Spirit.

(*2 Corinthians 3:16-18*) We will soon see:

Repentance leads to a four-fold promise from The Lord

6. IF therefore you will NOT watch I will come like a thief, and there is no way at all you can know the hour I will come upon you. (*Verses 3c-d*)

Surprise judgment: Jesus said His coming would be like a thief in the night. (*Matthew 24:42-47*)

Let us wake up and repent -- so we won't die

II. You have a few who are unsoiled, they will walk with Me, they will surely stay in The Book of Life, and I will confess them to My Father: Hear! (*Verses 4-6*)

- A. Those not soiled by their surroundings will walk with Me, they are worthy. (*Verse 4*)

1. But, you have a few names who have not soiled their garments. (*Verse 4a*)

Not soiled: By grace and by The Faith of Jesus this remnant is living in purity. They had not compromised as the majority had.

2. They will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. (*Verse 4b*)

First promise: Put positively, Jesus said all who take up their cross and follow Him (in daily death to sin) are considered worthy of Him. (*Matthew 10:38-39*) Further, those who have perseverance and faith in persecutions and afflictions are worthy of The Kingdom of God. (*2 Thessalonians 1:2-5*)

Let us wake up and repent -- so we won't die

- B. Each one overcoming in this way will be cleansed, NOT 'erased' from The Book of Life, and confessed before God. (*Verse 5*)

1. He who is overcoming in this way will be clothed in garments of white. (*Verse 5a*)

Full sanctification: All who stay unspoiled by materialism, greed and immorality have a second promise from Jesus: At His coming they will be fully clothed in white – sanctified by grace by faith! So rather than 'run with the pack' may we all walk with Jesus.

2. I will in no way 'erase' his name from The Book of Life. (*Verse 5b*)

Eternal, full and fruitful life: Put positively, this third promise is amazing. John's Gospel has three aspects of life given IN Jesus: eternal (*John 3:16-21*), full and abundant (*John 10:1-10*), and with the purpose of bearing fruit that will remain (*John 15:9-17*).

Let us wake up and repent -- so we won't die

3. And, I will confess his name before the face of My Father and all His messengers. (*Verse 5c*)

God THE Father: In this fourth promise, Jesus is restating a promise He gave on earth: 'Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven' (*Matthew 10:32*). This is powerful. Because some six decades later Jesus implies that for those who live pure lives by faith in God's Son, God becomes their Father! (Compare with *verse 2*)

Let us wake up and repent -- so we won't die

- C. If you have ears, **hear** what The Spirit says to The Churches. (*Verse 6*)

Holy Spirit: Today we have more Holy Spirit inspired Scripture (what is written) than they did. We have The Gospels and The New Testament.

Hear: In Scripture, 'hear' means we listen to God in all humility, and then by faith in His Son, obey all He has said to us. So, let's receive the faith to obey, so our works are complete in the eyes of God. And may our motivation be The LOVE God showed for us as Jesus died on The Cross.

Good Friday: In His humanity, Jesus prayed to avoid The Cross. But then He prayed THE Prayer: Thy will be done! (*Matthew 26:36-46*) As a result of what Jesus The Savior accomplished on The Cross, we may be in the remnant that will remain unsoiled by compromise with the world to receive His four promises!

Conclusion: The leader of the church in Sardis is commanded by Jesus to wake up complacent people who are living on their 'name' while NOT fulfilling their purpose in The Gospel of which they had taken hold. IF they do not keep this Gospel and repent, they are in danger of death by surprise judgment. However, four promises are given to the few who have not soiled themselves: they will walk worthy with Jesus, they will be clothed in white garments of purity, they will NOT be 'erased' from The Book of Life, and Jesus will confess each of them before His Father and His messengers. Finally, each one should obey in faith what The Spirit is saying.

Let us wake up and repent -- so we won't die