When Satan Robs A Church
Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV)

Please open your Bibles to our scripture text this morning in Revelation chapter three. And let's read verses 1-6.

Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV)

1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels

6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Prayer
Introduction

**illustration:** Back in the late 1970’s and early ‘80’s I was ministering at the Harvey’s Point Christian Church in rural central Illinois.

My office at the Church building was located upstairs just off the back of the auditorium. Well one morning when I went to my office, I got about halfway up the stairs when suddenly this strange feeling came over me.......the feeling that SOMETHING WAS MISSING!

So I turned around and went back downstairs. As I stood and surveyed the auditorium for a moment all the sudden it hit me! **The sound system speakers were missing off the platform.......and so was the P.A. system.** Upon further investigation I discovered that the little plastic Church bank that held the birthday offerings in it was also missing. **WE HAD BEEN ROBBED!**

I called the **MARION COUNTY SHERIFF’S DEPT.** to report the robbery. And before the deputy arrived I went through the rest of the Church building and discovered there were other things missing....approximately $3,000-$4,000 worth all told.

Fortunately for us the person who had robbed us wasn’t the brightest light on the Christmas tree. The guy had dropped his cigarette lighter on the floor by the baptistery and on the lighter were the robber’s hand carved initials.

As soon as the sheriff’s deputy saw those initials he immediately recognized them as the initials of a young guy in his early 20’s who was the prime suspect in several other church robberies that had occurred in our county. The guy was arrested and put in jail later that day.

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This morning I want all of us to give serious consideration to this important question: **What’s Missing In Our Church?**

When you carefully read the Lord’s Letter to The Church at Sardis it is very obvious this Church was missing some things. Satan, “the greatest thief of all” had broken in and robbed this Church of three life-giving things.

And as we look at these three things Satan robbed from the Church at Sardis, I want us to consider whether Satan has also robbed these same things from us here at Christian Hope Church of Christ.

**First of all........**

1. **Satan Had Robbed The Sardis Church of Her POWER (v.1)**

   **verse 1**  “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

   **ILLUSTRATION:** Years ago when I was preaching up in Virginia we had a terrible storm pass through our area one Sunday night while we were having our Church service.

   The lights flickered several times. Then all the sudden there was a loud clap of thunder and a flash of lightning and we had a complete power failure. We finished the service that night by candlelight.
1. The Church at Sardis had suffered a complete power failure......not the electrical kind, but the SPIRITUAL KIND.

2. Jesus said, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

3. Nobody could ever accuse the Church at Sardis of not being busy. There was something going on all the time!

......They had SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES for all ages.
...... They had ADULT WORSHIP and JUNIOR CHURCH and WEE WORSHIP
...... They had SUNDAY NIGHT CHURCH and WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY.
...... They had YOUTH MEETINGS and LADIES MEETINGS and COMMITTEE MEETINGS.
......They regularly had in GUEST SPEAKERS and TOP NOTCH singing groups.
......They were actively involved in the CHURCH SOFTBALL LEAGUE and CHURCH BASKETBALL LEAGUE.

Like the old comedian, Flip Wilson, used to say, “The Church at Sardis was the CHURCH OF WHAT’S HAPPENIN’ NOW!”

Listen very carefully! Just because a Church always has “something going on” and always “looks busy” doesn't necessarily mean the Church is healthy and alive!

4. When Jesus peeled back “the outer layer” of all that “religious activity” going on in the Church at Sardis, He saw the truth! Outwardly the Church had a reputation for being alive, but inwardly the Church was as “dead as dead can be!” Jesus saw a Church with “no spiritual pulse”......”no spiritual breath”......”no spiritual brain waves.”
5. They were missing the **POWER OF GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT.** Satan had robbed this Church of her **spiritual power** by getting her to rely upon **people power.**

    Just like **Samson in the Old Testament, “the power of the Holy Spirit had departed from the Church at Sardis”** and they were so wrapped up in all their “religious activities” and trying to maintain an appearance of “looking like an active, busy Church” that they didn’t even realize their Church had died.

6. **Is it possible……..** **IS IT POSSIBLE** the reason why so many Churches today are dying or have died is **the power of GOD is missing in their Church?** Is it possible many Churches are more concerned with “looking busy” rather than being **truly alive in the might and power of God's Holy Spirit?**

7. **One of the greatest warning signs that** **the power of GOD is missing in the Church is the lack of fervent PRAYER.**

    **“A prayerless Church is a powerless Church!”**

    When we do the work of the Church by our own human power, we do the work. But when the Spirit of God works through us we see great and mighty things happen in the Lord’s Church!
8. **When was the last time** we saw God do “great and mighty things” at Christian Hope Church? **When was the last time** we sensed the awesome power of God at work in this Church? **When was the last time** we saw something so unbelievable.....so incredible.....so wonderful.....we knew it was the mighty hand of GOD at work? **When was the last time** you got down on your knees before GOD and asked Him to do something great and mighty in this Church? **When was the last time** any of us dared to even ask the question: “What is GOD doing in Christian Hope Church?”

9. Satan had robbed the Church at Sardis of her spiritual POWER. Has he also robbed us?

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II. Satan Had Robbed The Sardis Church of Her **PASSION**

verses 1b, 2 “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God

1. When Jesus rebukes this Church for "being dead" and admonishes them to "be watchful" which is another way of saying "WAKE UP!" it is very obvious there was **no passion in the Church at Sardis.**

2. As a matter of fact, Jesus rebuked five of the seven Churches of Asia for their lack of passion and zeal for Him.

3. What are some of the WARNING SIGNS that Satan has robbed a Church of her passion?

   The three areas where it will show up the most is in the Church's **WORSHIP**......the Church's **WITNESS**......and the Church's **WORK.**

   A Church that has lost her passion typically has **boring, lifeless worship services.**

   A Church that has lost her passion typically does very little if any **witnessing to lost souls** outside the Church.

   And a Church that has lost her passion typically has very few people who are committed to **doing the Lord's work in the Church.**
When there is no passion in WORSHIP.....no passion to WITNESS to lost souls......and no passion to do the Lord's WORK.......the Church is either in the process of dying or already dead.

illustration: When I was in evangelistic work I did some fill-in preaching when I wasn’t out doing revivals. And I remember one Church in particular where I filled in for two Sundays in a row.

To start the service, the song leader gets up and with all the enthusiasm of a TURTLE ON VALIUM, says...
“Its good to see all of you here today.” “We especially want to welcome any visitors we have with us.......HOPE YOU’LL COME BACK.”

“Now if you’ll all pick up a hymnbook and turn to Hymn number 500, let’s stand and sing “When We All Get to Heaven.” Oh folks, I’m not a kidding you, the way the congregation sang that song it sounded like they were on their way to the dentist to get a “root canal” instead of on their way to heaven.

It was like this all the way through the service. The SINGING was DEAD.......the PRAYERS were dead! Even the men who came forward to serve the Lord’s Supper moved like a bunch of undertakers.

I leaned over to LINDA about halfway through the service and said, “THIS IS SUCKING THE LIFE RIGHT OUT OF ME!” And I didn’t know if I could STAY AWAKE long enough to PREACH!

Oh brothers and sisters, you know you’re in a dead Church when the most exciting part of the service is the benediction!!!
ILLUSTRATION

One night a Church building caught on fire and the local fire department was called in to try to save the structure.

The preacher and several of his church members stood by helplessly as they watched the firemen battle the blaze.

After getting the fire under control, the FIRE CHIEF walked over to the preacher to report on the extent of the damage. As the CHIEF started to walk away, the preacher jokingly said, “Well chief, this is the first time I’ve ever seen you at our Church.” The chief said, “Well preacher, this is the first time I’ve ever seen your church on fire.”

5. When was the last time you saw Christian Hope Church of Christ on fire? I’m not talking about the fire that destroyed your Church building many years ago. I mean when was the last time you saw this Church full of life and passion?

*Do we have PASSION in our WORSHIP?  
*Do we have PASSION in our WITNESS to the Lost?  
*Do we have PASSION in doing the Lord’s WORK?

6. I have yet to find one solitary verse of scripture where the LORD condemns a Church for being too passionate. But there are numerous passages of scripture where the LORD condemns a Church for lacking passion.

7. The kind of passion that Jesus is looking for is not something we can manufacture or produce on our own, the kind of passion the Lord is looking for is the genuine, authentic passion that is the out growth of a strong, healthy, vibrant relationship with Christ Himself.
And finally.......

III. Satan Had Robbed The Sardis Church of Her **PURITY** (v.4)

**verse 4** You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

1. There was widespread sin and immorality in the Church at Sardis. Jesus said, “you have a few......just a few who have not defiled their garments.”

That word “defiled” in the original Greek means to “soil” or “to pollute.” Its not talking about one's clothes, but rather it refers to the soiling or polluting of one's character.

2. We don't know how big the Church at Sardis was, but according to Jesus, there were only a handful of people in the whole Church who were truly trying to live holy and godly lives.

Satan had wormed his way into the minds and hearts of the Church members in Sardis and stolen their purity.
I’ve always been a big fan of the old western movies. And you know one thing I always liked about those movies was you could always tell the good guys from the bad guys. The good guys always wore white cowboy hats and the bad guys always wore black.

You know there once was a time when you could tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians because most Christians acted like Christians and non-Christians acted like non-Christians.

These days it is getting harder and harder to tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians. In fact, according to a survey done by the Barna Research Group, there is hardly any distinction at all.

3. I saw a quote years ago that really disturbed me. It went like this: “The two biggest reasons many people have never accepted Christ is because, NUMBER ONE: they have never met a Christian and NUMBER TWO: because they have.

4. Mohatma Ghandi was once asked what he thought of Christianity. He said, “Your Jesus I like……..your Christians I don't.”

5. Over these past forty years in the ministry I have seen a growing resistance towards the word of GOD in our Churches. The mindset of many Christians today is, “I have the right to live my life any way I want, and what I do in my own personal life is no one's business.”

6. Well let me tell you something. That attitude is exactly why our Churches have lost their witness and their influence with the non-believers in our communities.
7. Let me remind you that as Christians you and I don’t have **RIGHTS** we have **RESPONSIBILITIES**. “For you are not your own, you were bought with a price.” And that “price” was the very blood of Jesus Christ.

8. You and I have a responsibility to live pure and holy lives that will bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

We have a responsibility to **conduct ourselves as Ambassadors of Christ** knowing that the only Jesus people may ever know is the Jesus they see in us.

We have a responsibility to guard our habits, our actions, and our talk, so as not to be a “stumblingblock” to turn people away from Christ.

9. Like it or not, this community will judge Christ and judge this Church by what they see in you. May each of us seek to point people to Jesus not away from Him.

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Back in **November 2005** I held a revival meeting in Indiana not too far from where I grew up.

While I was there I had the opportunity to go visit a dear, sweet old friend in the hospital. AUDREY BARLOWE and her husband, HAROLD were my YOUTH SPONSORS and my BIBLE BOWL COACHES when I was a teenager.

AUDREY was one of the biggest “cut ups” I ever knew. She had an incredible sense of humor and one of the most contagious laughs I ever heard. She sounded just like a “cackling hen” when she laughed. **She was always so full of life and energy.**

But 35 years had passed since those days and as I looked at Audrey lying there in her hospital bed her spunk, her enthusiasm and energy were all gone.

I turned to her husband who was standing at the end of her bed and I said, **“Harold, how are you doing?”** He looked down and said, **“Oh, I’m alright.”**

I knew he wasn’t alright. **His heart was broken as he looked at his bride who was once so full of life, just lying there fading away.**

I believe that is the kind of “heartache” Jesus feels when He sees the declining condition of so many Churches today. The Lord was deeply saddened by the condition of the Church in Sardis. He saw a Church that evidently was once full of life, but over the course of time Satan had robbed the Church of her **POWER**....her **PASSION** ....and her **PURITY**. And they were in such a state of spiritual decline they didn’t even realize the Church had died. But Jesus saw it.......**JESUS SAW IT!**
But the LORD didn't leave this dead Church without hope!

In verse 3 Jesus gives this command to this “dead Church.”

“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.”

Brothers and sisters listen carefully! Repentance is the LORD's remedy for a dying Church. Churches die because Churches stop relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Churches die because they lose their passion for worship, for witnessing, and for the Lord's work. Churches die because they lose their purity which destroys the Churches influence and effectiveness in the community.

The only way we can get back those things which Satan has stolen from this Church is to repent of our sins and rekindle our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.