

“To Sardis: Wake Up!”
Revelation 3:1-6
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Revelation 3:1-6

To The Church in Sardis

“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.

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.² 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.³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Introduction

Jesus writes seven letters to churches in the first century. Though the letter was written in the first century, the contents are still relevant today, and we can apply the contents in different ways. This one is written to the city of Sardis, modern-day Sart, Asia-minor in Turkey. It was the capital of ancient city of Lydia. It was a city of great wealth and fame, where a tragic earthquake happened in AD 17.

In John’s day, the civic structures included a theatre, stadium, temples, and a central marble road. In addition, they had an acropolis, which is a high point in the city, which was a natural citadel in the northern spur of Mount Tamolis. It rose about 1500 feet above the lower valley. Ancient cities often grew up around a high point so they could easily be defended. Despite its high location, Sardis was captured twice in their history. Watchmen of Sardis had neglected their duties and perhaps fallen asleep. It is said that one person snuck into the city and just opened the door and the city was captured. This became a cautionary tale of misguided complacency and lack of vigilance. Although Jesus addresses no specific source of attack, He implies something similar- this church is asleep.

If you were to summarize these churches, they would be as follows:

Ephesus – The Cold Church

Smyrna – The Suffering Church

Pergamum - The Compromising Church

Thyatira – The Sick Church

Sardis – The Slumbering Church → What we will be talking about

Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

Laodicea – The Dead Church

*churches in bold are the churches that were rebuked by Jesus.

If you look at the churches that have been rebuked, you can see the progression of what happens. Ephesus was the cold church. They had lost their primary love for Jesus. And when you lose your love from Jesus, you compromise and begin looking to other things like Pergamum. When it becomes solidified in your life, you become sick, like Thyatira. Then, like Sardis, you become sleepy. Not because you're lazy, but because you're dying. Lastly in Laodicea, we know Jesus will be standing outside, knocking, at the door of the church that is dead.

Drunken drivers and sleepy drivers are equally dangerous because they lack focus and consciousness. We can see this as we look at this slumbering church, because they're not awakened.

Though they take on a different form, the essence of the worries in these letters is the same in the first and twenty-first centuries.

I. The Address [1a]

“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

Usually the address includes a description of Jesus' character that is geared towards the struggles of the church. In this one, Jesus is described as someone who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Seven, a complete number, represents the complete work of the Spirit. There is one Holy Spirit that works in multiple ways to empower each of the seven churches.

He holds the seven stars in his hands. We've talked about this before; I believe stars means messengers, meaning congregants of these seven churches, so all the believers in Jesus Christ. He himself with the Holy Spirit is strengthening the church of Jesus Christ.

We can see a fellowship between God and the church of Jesus Christ. We use the word “koinonia” which means fellowship, to describe the sharing of the powerful love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we are right between it. As Jesus holds us in his hands with the Holy Spirit, we are in this incredible fellowship that God has and are receiving the power, grace, and love because we are in Christ. So that we will shine, so that we will be a witness in the world, just as stars shine.

Philippians 2:15 *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,* It says ‘lights’ here but the NIV says ‘stars,’ and I believe the word can be both lights and stars shining in the world. Jesus holds the stars and empowers us with the Holy Spirit so that we will be bright, shining in the world. This is so that we may be witnesses as He empowers us to be salt and light in the world. This is in alignment with the next verse.

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

To the church of Jesus Christ as ‘you’ here is plural. We are in the hand of Christ and Jesus Christ has been empowering us so that we will be brighter witnesses in the world.

Revelation 5:6 *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

Here, the seven eyes represent the seven spirits of God, sent out into the world. Jesus is looking at the world with seven eyes, through the means of the Holy Spirit.

2 Chronicles 16:9 *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars.”*

The Holy Spirit is looking for someone to empower and strengthen. Even now, and today, the Holy Spirit is moving, looking for someone who is blameless.

You liked that all except the word blameless, thinking ‘oh, I’m full of blame.’ Blameless does not mean perfect. Throughout the book of Revelation, we are *blamefull* but we can be *blameless* because of the blood of Jesus Christ. It cleanses us constantly so even if we fall, He continues to forgive us again and again and again and again. Blameless here means repentant, forgiven, and fighting sinners. No one is blameless, but the ones who rely on the blood of Jesus Christ and are willing to live and fight even while they fail, are ones chosen by the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the rebuke, Jesus also provides hope. It’s ok if you’ve had a bad break, you can start all over because of Jesus Christ. You can get up. You cannot fall lower than Christ, because He’s our rock-solid foundation underneath us, so receive grace and forgiveness and keep on going. He is with each one of you, who represent Christ. We are too ready to assume that God will deal with everyone exactly as He does with us. But He is no mass-producer and treats no two alike. Each and every one of you, He is working in you so He may work through you. The greatest evidence of God’s love is Jesus Christ, so in your hearts, remember Jesus. Christ in you is the greatest evidence of God, so as you exalt Him, may others see Him in you. With that hope and foundation, Jesus rebukes.

II. The Rebuke [1b-2]

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.² 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.

A. Sleeping [1-2]

I don’t think it means that the church is completely dead but comparing it to their reputation of being alive, the phrase ‘you are dead’ is used. They were falling asleep, so they were losing life. As Sardis sleeps, their life is getting sucked out of them and they are on the verge of death.

B. Waking [1-2]

² *Wake up*

They’re slowly losing light and power to witness. Like the Ephesians, Sardinians have lost their ability to witness. They were a city of fame in the past without glory in the present. The attitude of the city had infected the church and they were too much like the world (we’ve got to be *in* the

world but not *of* the world). They retained the reputation for being spiritually alive, but in truth were nearly spiritually dead. So, what is reputation?

“Reputation is who people think you are, integrity is who you are.” – John Wooden

Reputation can be generated by past success, but there can be a world of difference between reputation and reality. It’s always sad to see people who always talk about their glory days, whatever it was, because they believe their prime that was in the past. I hope you will never talk about your Glory Days spiritually. I pray that for all of us, today will be your “glory days”.

So, Sardis was riding on the fumes of reputation in the past, but did not possess the flames of revival in the present. In the past, they were burning, but now there’s only smoke and the fire’s gone. They cared more about the opinion of man rather than the opinion of God. In these cases, we need refueling that leads to revival, and intimacy that leads to empowerment from God.

Some of you like to be alone, and some like to be with others. We need balance, where we have solitude and intimate moments with God, but also time with people so that He can shine through. If we don’t have intimacy with God, we shine whatever we have- our personality, our darkness, our sinfulness- rather than our light that we receive from the Lord. We need to be with people so that we may shine and receive. You need the community and time with others, but each one of us needs a personal relationship with God. And we need to value what God thinks of us rather than other people.

“If the Lord is with me, it matters little who deserts me” – Charles Spurgeon.

Sometimes, when we care too much about reputation, we get too hurt by what others think. We need to be thinking of God’s eyes searching us. The mandate for Sardis is “wake up.” It’s present, active, meaning constantly awakened. Make sure it’s the condition of your heart always, even when you’re sleeping: in your dreams, seek Jesus. The sleeping majority of Sardis had forgotten the grace received in the past, and forgotten they were engaged in spiritual Holy War. A lone soldier came sneaking into the city to destroy the city. Always be watchful.

C. Completing [2]

for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

While the letter mentions no external threats, such as Jezebel or Balaam-like prophets, to the city, that hindered the life of faithful service, something had happened which impeded further progress. They were spiritually unconscious, and their spiritual lives hit a plateau. They couldn’t complete the task or purpose God set for them and ceased to grow. Their reputation led to arrogance, and Sardis identified themselves by their reputation rather than who they really are according to the Word of God.

Sometimes, we can be misled to defining ourselves by others’ opinions. We must examine ourselves through the mirror of God’s word to determine whether we’re awake or dead spiritually. Consider what others say, but always look at scripture to examine your heart.

Sardis's holy dissatisfaction, which drives us to go to the Word, was gone. They had no fight or fire left in them. We lose our desire to grow all the time. When things go well, pride can take place and we lose our heart to grow. When things go bad, we get discouraged and lose our hearts to grow. When things are mundane, we seek pleasure in other things and our hearts get divided. In every condition of our spiritual life we can lose our heart to grow, so guard your heart, which is the wellspring of your life.

UConn Women's Basketball, an unbelievable team, who in 4 years only lost once, lost in the NCAA semi-finals this year. Gino Smith, their coach and probably one of the best coaches ever, said something surprising in his post-game interview: "Maybe we weren't ready to play because we always won and never experienced this feeling of being in a locker room of losers. This time we lost and experienced what it feels like to lose. Maybe next year we'll be ready." We can become complacent, so never lose hunger to grow.

III. The Instruction [3]

³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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.

A. Back to the basics

³ Remember, then, what you received and heard.

Often when we plateau in our spiritual lives, we seek new experiences, like a new church or a new Bible. But this is when we should be seeking deeper experiences rather than new ones. It happens through the same things you know- the Word of God and prayer. There are no fancy things about spiritual life- Word of God, prayer, the Church, other believers, and small group to strengthen and empower you. Go to others that are brighter than you so you can get their light.

B. Back to the cross

Keep it, and repent.

"The nearer a man lives to God, the more intensely has he to mourn over his own evil heart." – Charles Spurgeon

"The sinner can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid than he can create a world." – Charles Spurgeon

Holy Spirit has to help you and He uses the Word of God. Sometimes we think as we get closer to God, there are less things to repent about. It's the opposite: the closer you get to God, the more your sins are revealed to you. That's why you grow more and become humble. You don't repent to reform yourself; you repent to change your mind, change your direction, to receive from the Lord, and go to the cross rather than do it on your own. Repent to charge your soul by His grace, and never be discouraged. It's a blessing that though our sin and flesh live in us, and even Satan lives in the world, our Lord Jesus Christ lives. That's all that matters regardless of what else is alive, is that Jesus is alive.

C. Back to the future

I will come like a thief

Often, this language is associated with the second coming of Jesus Christ. When this phrase appears in Revelation, it reminds us of the temporary discipline of God which warns us of the second coming, so that in the present we may live faithfully. He disciplines out of love so that we repent. No matter the trials of this world, the punishment is nothing compared to what we deserve in eternity. The city of Sardis knew tragedies could happen through their earthquake. We need to be constantly aware that the final judgment is coming and never stop wanting to grow.

“If I’m not today all I hope to be, yet I see Jesus, that assures me that I shall one day be like Him.” – Anonymous

Be awakened in prayer and intimacy with God. Don’t live off fumes but always seek fire of ongoing intimacy with Christ.

IV. The examples [4]

⁴ 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 word we used in previous letters was “encouragement”. This one is an encouragement as well, but previously the encouragement came before the rebuke. This time, it seems the rebuke is intentionally before the encouragement. I believe it’s because Jesus is using the following people as examples.

‘People who have not soiled their garments’ didn’t compromise with pagan idolatry and lived holy and righteously. The difference between them and the others is the key phrase “*they will walk with me*”. They have been walking with Christ, and will eternally be with Him. The hope is that they still had a few unstained disciples. God does not need many. Matthew says the “harvest is plentiful but workers are *few*.” We should strive to be the ones that have trained and Jesus considers as workers.

To parents: be a hope for the younger generation. We may have failures in the world -- be honest about them. But make sure as you fight, you’re progressing and growing. We become the hope for the younger generation. Please listen to my sermon this past Friday (3/31/2017) “Gender Identity.” There’s a culture and meaning in to this word, and you need to understand what the world is teaching students about their gender identity. It’s a crooked and depraved generation, and we need to learn how to think and discern. Make sure you’re giving your spiritual and biological children our faith, our relationship with Christ, and the right training. We pray that their vision for the world are eyes that can see the Kingdom of God. Don’t simply leave an inheritance *for* your children, but a legacy *in* them.

V. The promise [5-6]

⁵ 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. ⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

A. White garments [5]

⁵*The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments*

Revelation 7:9 *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*

White garments will be given to all the believers of Jesus Christ. Because of Him, we are white, pure, and washed by the blood of the lamb though we are sinful.

Revelation 19:14 *And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.*

The Church of Jesus Christ comprises the armies of heaven who are clothed in white linen: fine and pure.

Revelation 6:11 *Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

Martyrs are told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers should be complete. Everybody has a reason to die, for these people it just happened to be Jesus. These martyrs denied themselves and loved Jesus and others more than they loved themselves. A believer in Christ is someone who dies to themselves each day, symbolic of what the martyrs did physically. They are given these white garments as well. Whether we die or we are alive, we live for Jesus.

B. Book of Life [5]

⁵*The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.*

We know through Exodus 32 and Daniel 12:1 that it was a register of all citizens in the Kingdom Community. If your name is not written in this book, you will face eternal judgment. Revelations 20:15 says that if anybody's name was not found in the Book of Life, he would be thrown into the lake of fire. Like Jesus, we need to wear the white robe, washed by the blood of the lamb. We put our faith in Him so that we may be as righteous as Him because He died for our sins. In Revelation, it seems like there are two kinds of books.

Revelation 20:12 *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

There are books, plural. Books for believers and books that will write all the deeds of everyone that will be judged according to what they had done. For those apart from Christ, they would receive eternal judgment. But you can never lose salvation if you're in Jesus Christ.

C. I will confess his name [5-6]

I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

This passage compares the reputation of earth to God's approval. He's saying that man's reputation is not what you're living for but God's approval- not even your own approval but God's approval. Christians on earth must confess His name at the cost of losing approval from

others, because being known by Jesus is the most important thing. Sometimes, we can be deceived to think that we are known by Jesus but we might not be.

Matthew 7:22-23 *On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'* Just because you do a lot of big things, it doesn't mean you have an intimate relationship with Christ in such a way that you are washed by the lamb. At the end of all things, God will not ask what we know, but who we know, and who we are known by. This knowledge talks about deep intimacy, love with Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:12 *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13 is the best chapter in the Bible about love. Jesus will know the depth of the intimacy that we have with Him. We will confess the love before the father and attend the wedding feast of the lamb. So, wake up!

Pastor Min's Warning:

Nobody knew that Sardis was spiritually dying, everyone thought this church was thriving. I question: is CFC dying? Though I think we have a relatively good reputation, no one will be able to tell until Christ's evaluation. This applies personally as well. Reputation is not reality: you can still look good but still be dying. You may have fumes- no fire, but smoke- and heat from the past, but no fire to sustain you and you may slowly get cooler and die. I think whether personally or corporately, always look for the beginning of fireless-ness, because when it starts, there's no desire in you. Don't always rely on emotion, but ask: do you have in your heart the ability to love Jesus? If there's a small decrease in your passion, desire, love, or focus for the Lord, be warned. I always say: today you should love Jesus more than yesterday, and tomorrow more than today. Always let today be your Glory Day.

Pastor Min's Encouragement:

Revelation 3:2

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.

I think He is thinking of completion of their work and witness, caused by the fire in their hearts, so that there will be a continual fire in their hearts so they can be stars and lights to their community and the world. We know that believers have a fire in our hearts. When we think about our hearts, they will never die. Even at your worst, if you're a believer in Christ, though it may look like your fire is dead, you're like an ember. You may have bad moments in your spiritual life, the wind of the Spirit through the Word will blow the fire alive. Listen to His Word, and see Him and your heart will light up with the flame so you may finish His work for His glory.