

The Seven Churches of Revelation
Revelation 3:1-6
“Sardis: The Church of the Walking Dead”

Introduction

Jesus introduces Himself to The Church of Sardis as **“He, who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (vs. 3:1)”**. As we have previously discussed, the “seven stars” are the angels (pastors) of the seven churches. Christ holds his anointed leaders in the palm of His hands. They are His ambassadors to the church. He leads them, He equips them, and He corrects them, as needed. A pastor who is not completely under the control of The Lord Jesus will lead the church astray, and apparently, this had happened in Sardis, for the church there had allowed sin to bring about its own demise. This once vibrant candlestick among the seven churches had completely lost its light. A darkness had fallen upon the city of Sardis, and its people were caught completely unawares. Jesus has nothing positive to say about the church save for a few remains in it that had not fallen into sinful depravity. Though there was a remnant of the faithful left in Sardis, the rest unfortunately had no trace of The Holy Spirit within them. They were merely tares growing among the few remaining stalks of wheat in Sardis (**Matthew 13:24-30**). Although they gave off a “religious” appearance, they were soon destined to stand before The LORD and hear the words, **“Depart from Me, for I never knew you (Matthew 7:21-23)”**. Religion, or simply being good, has never been able to save a single soul. Only a personal relationship with Jesus SAVES. The Church at Sardis had a good reputation (**vs. 1**), but what it needed was redemption. There was a body, but no spirit. The Church was dead.

The LORD tells them that HE has the “seven Spirits of God”. This is a very “Old Testament” reference to the fact that the Messiah (The Christ) would be completely filled with The Holy Spirit. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this fact and describes for us the “sevenfold” Spirit of The LORD that would be “resting upon” (or Filling) The Holy One who would one day descend from King David’s line.

**“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
 from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
 The Spirit of The LORD (1) will rest upon Him.
 The Spirit of wisdom (2) of understanding (3).
 the Spirit of counsel (4) and of power (5).
 the Spirit of knowledge (6) and fear (7) of The LORD —
 and He will delight in the fear of The LORD.”**

Isaiah 11:1-3

Seven in the scriptures is the number of completeness. Jesus The Messiah is in fact “completely” filled with The Spirit of God, for He and God are one and the same! It is this immutable fact that allows Christ to discern whether or not a church is filled with The Spirit. Sardis, though having a reputation of being a church, was in fact devoid of the Holy Spirit. Just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also is a church. Without The Holy Spirit, a church is just a social club. There were a few real believers who attended the church at Sardis, but by and large, the congregation there was filled with lost sinners, who had never repented at the foot of the cross. Jesus admonishes them to REVIVE (wake up), REMEMBER, and REPENT, or else He would come like a thief in the night and bring judgment upon them.

The city of Sardis was built by the Greeks upon a three sided cliff. Because of the near impossibility of scaling its sheer walls, the people of the city thought the city to be safe from any dangers. Twice in its history the cliffs had actually been scaled by enemy forces and the city overthrown. Even a child could have warded off these enemy invasions, but due to overconfidence in their security, the people of Sardis had neglected to post any centuries upon the walls overlooking the cliffs. They had went to bed thinking they were safe and sound, but they had awoken to the sounds of enemy soldiers looting in the city streets. Overconfidence had led to their downfall.

After a similar fashion, the church at Sardis had allowed sin to infiltrate their church. With the exception of very few (**vs. 4**), they had let their guard down and allowed the enemy to slip in. As a result,

the church that had once been a stronghold for Christ had allowed itself to become a fortress of Satan. Jesus had nothing positive to say about their deeds. He did promise to honor the ones who had not taken part in their debauchery, but He let it be known that repentance must soon take place or they would suffer His wrath (**vs. 3**). It is interesting to note that there is not a single mention of the church suffering for their testimony as is mentioned of the other churches. This is because Satan has no need to persecute a church that is dead. The church of Sardis was exactly where the devil wanted them to be. They were fruitless and filled with decay. They needed to wake up and see the enemy that was inside the walls (**vs. 3**). It was their only hope to rejoin the battle and become victorious. It was time for revival in Sardis. It was time to REVIVE, REMEMBER, and REPENT.

REVIVE

Jesus commands the dead church of Sardis to WAKE UP (**vs. 2,3**). It is important for us to remember that He has the power over life and death, and even though the church was dead, he had the ability to resurrect it. They simply needed to hear His voice and come forth from the grave just as his friend Lazarus had done (**John 11:43**). Jesus knows perfectly well how to resurrect a dead church! Sardis was in desperate need of a coming-out-of-the-grave party! Complacency KILLS churches. Obviously the church had once been vital, or there would not have been a believing "remnant" in their midst. Sadly, so many times churches that start out with the best of intentions grow colder and colder as they let the enemy scale the walls into their fellowship. All it takes is to fail to be on guard, to sleep while the enemy is climbing the wall. The final result will always be the same. There will be more tares in the field than wheat. As the older saints who were on fire for Christ go on to glory, the younger church members never actually come to know Christ. This is why it is so very important for us to make disciples out of our young people. It is a matter of life or death, because one day, the very life of the church will be left in their hands. I have heard it said that the church is always but one generation away from extinction. This is an absolute fact. So the question that remains for us is this: what are you doing today that will prevent the death of the church of tomorrow? We must MAKE DISCIPLES of our children! I know that I sound like a broken record sometimes, but really, what else truly matters?

Every single week, a large number of children attend our Sunday morning services. What kind of an impact could we have upon these kids, if we truly put their needs and their future above that of our own? I am reminded of the story of Hezekiah, King of Judah, in **2 Kings**. Hezekiah had been miraculously healed by God from a disease that would have brought about his death (**2 Kings 20**). As it turned out, it might have been much better for the people of Judah had the old king died. For after he was healed, he became complacent and careless, even going so far as to allow the enemies of Judah (Babylonians) access to His palace and showing them all the treasures of the land (**2 Kings 20:12**). In other words, he let the enemy waltz right into to his house! God sent a prophet to warn Hezekiah that one day in the future, these same Babylonians would come and take away all of his treasures, and even carry off some of his own descendants in chains (**20:15-18**). Do you know how Hezekiah responded to the news? He was relieved that He wouldn't be the one to suffer the consequences of his sin (**vs. 19**)!!

Did you see that?! Hezekiah was RELIEVED that he would be ok, but the future generations of his kingdom would suffer the consequences. Talk about being self-absorbed. The man needed a wake up call! Think of how completely selfish it was for him to care so little about the people of tomorrow, so long as he would have a good life of treasures in his storehouse. Sadly we are just like Hezekiah, if we give no thought to the enemy coming to carry off our children! It happened then. It happened in Sardis, and it is happening now all over America in the zombie churches of the walking dead! It is time for the church to WAKE UP and arise! We need REVIVAL.

REMEMBER

I find it interesting that Jesus tells the church of Sardis the same thing that He tells the church of Ephesus... REMEMBER. You see, no church has ever been planted out of a sense of complacency. Churches are planted out of passion. Someone who is desperately in love with Jesus and wants to see His word taught and honored is the kind of believer who would lead the way in planting a church. Most Biblical historians believe that the church at Sardis was started by the Apostle Paul, though there is no real Biblical evidence to support this view. Nonetheless, if Paul had indeed planted the church there, it

could not have had a more passionate founder! Paul once famously said, **“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21)!”** Now THAT is the kind of spirit that plants churches. Jesus wanted the Ephesians and the Sardinians to go back to that kind of passionate love for Him. You can tell if someone is filled with The Holy Spirit, if they are passionately in love with Christ and with their fellow believers. No Spirit-filled Christian ever said, “As long as I am ok that’s all that matters”, the way that Hezekiah did. A Spirit-filled Christian will desperately long to see lost souls come to repentance.

Sadly the church at Sardis was running out of Spirit filled Christians. Those who had taken their place had allowed sin to master them and had forgotten the things of God. They had become content to go through the motions of Christianity, while relying upon the past reputation of the church on fire to carry them through. Unfortunately, reputation is not able to save and never has been. There can be no substitute for a passionate relationship with Jesus. Do you remember when you first came to Christ? Do you remember how excited that you were, how you couldn’t wait to share your faith? Do you remember the first time you attended a Bible study and thanks to the new work of The Holy Spirit within you, the scriptures came alive and made sense for the very first time! That is the kind of passion that Christ wants His church to have for Him! He wants us to have zeal. Can I ask you a question this morning? Do you still have the passion for Him that you had at the first?

I do not believe that a person who has been saved after a true encounter with Jesus can ever lose that salvation. I know that some Bible teachers try and teach that, but their doctrine is severely flawed. Jesus holds those of us who have been given to Him by God, we do not hold Him (**John 17:12**). That being said, if we lose our passion for serving Christ, we will become a poor witness to those who do not know Him. We become as salt that has lost our savor (**Matt. 5:13**). The Church at Sardis was a lampstand that had been placed there to shine the light of Christ (**Matt. 5:14**), but that light had gone out. When we lose our devotion, our churches are in danger of becoming filled with lost souls who know nothing of His light. A lampstand in those days had to be filled with oil in order for it’s flame to burn. A lampstand that runs out of oil is useless. Oil in the scriptures is a reference to The Holy Spirit. When a church loses The Spirit, it dies. The light goes out of the lampstand. It is impossible to accomplish “spiritual things” without The Spirit. This is why Jesus reminds them that He has the seven Spirits of God. The church at Sardis had plenty of members, but few who were truly born again believers. The once shining light had gone out in Sardis. They needed to remember how they started. They needed to get back to the “light source”. They needed to return to Jesus!

REPENT

And just how does a lost person get to Jesus? REPENTANCE! That seems to be an ugly word these days in a world where folks don’t particularly enjoy being told that what they are doing is wrong, but without repentance there can be no salvation. The church at Sardis needed to fall upon its knees, confess its sin, and ask for forgiveness and restoration. Only then would The Holy Spirit return and relight the lampstand that had gone out in Sardis. Only then would the dead church be brought back to life. It was there for the taking, all they needed to do to obtain everything Jesus had for them was to return to Him in repentance, and they would be fully restored (**vs.3**). They needed to do an autopsy, a self evaluation to determine what was the cause of death (unconfessed sin) and be broken by it. Without brokenness, there can be no revival. Brokenness and repentance are the vital elements needed to raise a dead church to life again. Has there been a time in your life that you have been truly broken over your sins and asked The LORD for forgiveness and mercy? If not, then just going to church, and trying to “be good” is merely dead religion. Repentance will allow you to be reborn and filled with The Spirit of God. I have spoken to several people in my many years of ministry, who tell me of the emptiness that they feel inside. They go regularly to church, but sadly they NEVER seem to quite “get it”. May I say to you this morning, that this should never be the case. Get real with God. Do a thorough examination of the stains that sin has left upon your soul this morning and repent in brokenness to Christ and see just how real He will become for you today. Allow Him to wash your garments spotless this morning (**vs. 4**). Let Him forever change your very nature. It is there for the taking. All you need to do is ask for it in repentance.

There were a small number of true believers that remained in Sardis. A remnant to remind of the church’s former glory. Jesus promised them that they wouldn’t be forsaken. Their names were written in indelible ink in the Lambs Book of Life never to be erased (**vs. 4-5**). They had not given themselves over

to the immorality that others had within the church. They had not “soiled themselves” with the sin that had crept in like an enemy that had scaled the walls under the cover of darkness. Though they were not sinlessly perfect (for none of us are), they would be presented to His Father as though they were (**vs. 5**). This is what Jesus promises to EVERY Spirit-filled believer. We shall be presented before Our Heavenly Father dressed in the righteousness of Christ Himself. If that doesn't make you want to shout this morning, then perhaps you should think on it some more! If you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, then He will present you as spotless before the Throne of God! Can I get a word of TRUTH in the house this morning?

To be filled with The Spirit is to never become a dead church. If the Lord were to walk among us this morning (and trust me He is), then in what shape would he find us: Filled with His Spirit and on fire for His mission, or dead and going through the motions, living on things that haven't happened long ago? I pray that He would find us a lampstand brightly burning and filled with the anointing oil of His Holy Spirit! REVIVE, REMEMBER, and REPENT. May the flame within this place never go out. May the LORD never need to perform an autopsy on us! **“He who has an ear, let him hear what The Spirit says to the churches.”**

And ALL of GOD'S people said... TRUTH!!!