

“The Church in Sardis”
Revelation 3:1-6

Introduction: As we come to the third chapter of Revelation, we catch a glimpse of the last three churches of the church dispensation. The first, being Sardis, covers the era known as the Reformation. After coming out of the fires of persecution during the Dark Ages, the church fell into a sleeping state. While Luther and Calvin were trying to purify the Catholic organization from within, God’s children fell asleep allowing their ministry to die. Our Lord’s warning to them was to repent or face the judgment of God. Notice how this letter unfolds to the church and the sacred promise given to the remnant that remained.

1. The Announcement v. 1- *“And unto the angel...”*
 - a. A Divine Announcement Revelation 1:11- *“I am Alpha and Omega”*
 - b. A Direct Announcement- *“unto the angel”*
2. The Angel v. 1- *“the angel of”*
 - a. The Meaning of an Angel
 - (1) “angel” (Strong’s)- “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, a messenger from God”
 - (2) “angel” (Webster’s)- “A minister of the gospel, who is an ambassador of God. Literally, a messenger; one employed to communicate news or information from one person to another at a distance.”
 - b. The Message of an Angel- *“write”* Revelation 1:11- *“write in a book”*
3. The Assembly v. 1- *“the church in Sardis write”*
 - a. The Explanation of Sardis
 - (1) “Ancient Sardis, the capital of Lydia, was a most important city. It lay about fifty miles east of Ephesus at the junction of five main roads; so it was a center for trade.” (Wiersbe)
 - (2) “It was also a military center, for it was located on an almost inaccessible plateau. The acropolis of Sardis was about 1,500 feet above the main roads, and it formed an impregnable fortress.” (Wiersbe)
 - (3) “The main religion in the city was the worship of Artemis, one of the “nature cults” that built on the idea of death and rebirth.” (Wiersbe)
 - b. The Era of Sardis- A.D. 1500-1700

Body: What was the reason for writing to the assembly at Sardis? Was it to correct some false doctrine? Could it have been to commend them for a well-done service during times of persecution? Possibly, could it have been to recognize their great accomplishments as a soul-winning church? Sadly, none of these was the motivation for this letter. The main grounds they received an epistle from the Lord was to wake them up to the fact that they were dead, living on past memories. Warren Wiersbe states that, “There was reputation without reality, form without force.” Their problem was that they were riding on past visions without having present victories. They were, as Luke describes, unfit for the

kingdom of God (Luke 9:62- “*And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*”). Was there any hope for the ever-dieing remnant at Sardis? Could they recover from this comatose state? Let us look at this letter and observe what our Lord offers them as a means of revival.

- I. The Overseer of the Church v. 1- “*These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars*”
 - A. A Reminder of His Possession of the Spirits- “*These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God*” Revelation 1:4, Isaiah 11:2
 1. “There is only one Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:4), but the number seven demonstrates fullness and completeness.” (Wiersbe)
 2. “The sevenfold Spirit of God is pictured as seven burning lamps (Rev. 4:5) and as seven all-seeing eyes (Rev. 5:6).” (Wiersbe)
 - B. A Reminder of His Possession of the Stars- “*and the seven stars*” 2:1
 1. “In one might hand, the Lord held the seven spirits of God; in the other, the seven stars.” (Phillips)
 2. “The church is to be weighed against all that is implied by the sevenfold Spirit of God.” (Phillips)
- II. The Occupation of the Church vs. 1-4- “*I know thy works...*”
 - A. The Reality about Sardis v. 1- “*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*”
 1. Their Declaration- “*thou hast a name that thou livest*”
 - a. “A ‘rocking chair’ has motion but no movement.” (Simpson)
 - b. “What good is a water fountain if it’s not hooked up to the well?” (Simpson)
 - c. “By making a lot of religious racket we assure our faltering hearts that everything is well...” (Simpson)
 2. Their Deadness- “*and art dead*”
 - a. “Astronomers tell us that the light from the polar star takes thirty-three years to reach the earth. That star could have been plunged into darkness thirty years ago, and its light would still be pouring down to earth. It would be shining in the sky tonight as brightly as if nothing had happened. It could be a dead star, shining solely by the light of a brilliant past. The church at Sardis was like that. It had a name, but it was dead. It was shining solely by the light of a brilliant past.” (Phillips)
 - b. “The message to Sardis is a warning to all ‘great churches’ that are living on past glory.” (Wiersbe)
 - c. “...a church is in danger of death when it begins to worship its own past...” (Barclay)
 - d. “Dr. Vance Havner has frequently reminded us that spiritual ministries often go through four stages: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument.” (Wiersbe)
 - e. “Do an autopsy on the church: no movement- fellowship; no senses- see, hear, feel, smell, respond, touch.” (Simpson)

B. The Remains at Sardis v. 2

1. The Slothfulness of the Remains- *“Be watchful”* Romans 13:11, Judges 16:20

- a. “Although the situation of the city was ideal for defense, as it stood high above the valley of Hermus and was surrounded by deep cliffs almost impossible to scale, Sardis had twice before fallen because of overconfidence and failure to watch. In 549 B.C. the Persian King Cyrus had ended the rule of Croesus by scaling the cliffs under the cover of darkness. In 214 B.C. the armies of Antiochus the Great (III) captured the city by the same method.” (Walvoord)
- b. “The first step toward renewal in a dying church is honest awareness that something is wrong.” (Wiersbe)
- c. “When an organism is alive, there is growth, repair, reproduction, and power; if these elements are lacking in a church, then that church is either dying or already dead.” (Wiersbe)

2. The Strengthening of the Remains- *“and strengthen the things which remain”*

- a. “At Sardis, even the things that remained were in danger and needed strengthening.” (Phillips)
- b. Matthew 12:20- *“A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.”*
- c. “The bruised reed represents things that have never been of any use; and the smoking flax, the smoking lamp, represents things that have been useful but are no longer so. From the bruised reed He can make a flute from which can flow the very harmony of heaven, and from the smoking flax He can make a lamp to light the world. Yet without the restoration, little of good could be found in this church.” (Phillips)

3. The Situation of the Remains- *“that are ready to die”*

4. The Slackness of the Remains- *“for I have not found thy works perfect before God”*

C. The Remedy for Sardis v. 3

1. They Must Remember- *“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard”*

- a. “The Lord is ever calling our wandering thoughts and affections back to Himself.” (Phillips)
- b. “His last act before He went to Calvary was to institute a feast of remembrance to draw us back to Himself again and again during our pilgrimage on earth.” (Phillips)
- c. II Peter 3:1- *“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance”*

2. They Must Retain- *“and hold fast”*

3. They Must Repent- *“and repent”*
4. They Might Regret- *“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”*
 - a. Their Lack of Attention- *“If therefore thou shalt not watch”*
 - b. Their Lesson of an Arrival- *“I will come on thee as a thief”*
 - c. Their Lack of an Announcement- *“and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”*

(1) “The Lord warned the Ephesian saints that He would come and remove their lampstand if they did not repent (Rev. 2:5). He warned the church at Pergamos that He would come and make war with the sword of the Spirit (Rev. 2:16).” (Wiersbe)

(2) “If the believers at Sardis did not follow His orders, He would come as a thief, when they least expected Him; and this would mean judgment.” (Wiersbe)

(3) “A thief comes to spoil and to remove everything of value.” (Phillips)

(4) “The Lord warns this local church that if there is not self-judgment, He will come suddenly and break up the testimony once and for all. It is a remarkable fact that western Asia Minor, now Turkey, was once the brightest spot on earth for gospel witness. Today it is one of the darkest.” (Phillips)

D. The Remnant at Sardis v. 4- *“Thou hast a few names...”*

1. The Remnant’s Purity- *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments”*
 - a. “Where there is life, there is hope!” (Wiersbe)
 - b. “What was different about this dedicated remnant? They had not defiled their garments. There is some evidence from antiquity that temple worshipers were not permitted to approach their gods and goddesses wearing dirty garments. The remnant in the church at Sardis had not compromised with the pagan society around them, nor had they grown comfortable and complacent. It was this devoted spiritual remnant that held the future of the church’s ministry.” (Wiersbe)
2. The Remnant’s Promise- *“and they shall walk with me in white”*
Matthew 17:2
3. The Remnant’s Prestige- *“for they are worthy”*

III. The Overcoming of the Church v. 5- *“He that overcometh...”*

A. The Clothing of the Overcomer- *“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment”*

1. “Sardis was also known for its manufacture of woolen garments, a fact that has bearing on Christ’s message to the church. Sad to say, the city at that time was but a shadow of its former splendor; and the

- church, unfortunately, had become like the city—it was alive in name only.” (Wiersbe)
2. “The promise in Revelation 3:5 (“clothed in white raiment”) would have been especially meaningful to people who lived in a city where woolen garments were manufactured.” (Wiersbe)
- B. The Continuation of the Overcomer- *“and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life”*
1. “And the statement about the names being blotted out would also be significant to people in the Roman Empire, where citizenship was vitally important (see Acts 22:24-30).” (Wiersbe)
 2. “Is there a warning here that a true believer might lose his salvation? I don’t think so. It would appear that God’s ‘Book of Life’ contains the names of all the living, the wicked as well as the righteous (Ps. 69:28).” (Wiersbe)
- C. The Confessing about the Overcomer- *“but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”*
1. Before the Almighty- *“but I will confess his name before my Father”* Matthew 10:32
 2. Before the Angels- *“and before his angels”* Luke 12:8
- IV. The Obligation of the Church v. 6- *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*
- A. The Prerequisites of Hearing- *“He that hath an ear”* Matthew 13:9
 - B. The Purpose of Hearing- *“let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* Matthew 11:15

Conclusion: Many times ministries “survive” off past blessings without realizing that they are dead. They become cold, complacent, and comfortable without even knowing their own wretched condition. However, no matter how lax any congregation becomes, there is always hope. If Sardis would remember, repent, and revive, God would give them a refreshing that would salvage their ministry. We ought to be thankful that we serve a God of a second chance, even in times of our slothfulness!