



Sleeping in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

BIBLE PASSAGE

Rev 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." '

SARDIS (SARDINES)

Found in northeastern Turkey - The name "Sardis" at that time was associated with wealth, luxury, soft morals, and loose living.

Sardis was considered the wealthiest city in that province during that time.

- **[image] It is highly agreed upon that the earliest coins were minted in the city of Sardis**
- Sardis was the home of the temple of Artemis (virgin moon goddess).

- Sardis was also known for its unique natural defenses against outside enemy forces. By the nature of its location, the city was virtually impenetrable. **[image] Located in the valley of Hermes, it was surrounded by towering mountain ranges on every side.**

This created an attitude of self-confidence in the city. On more than one occasion in the city's history, there was a lack of preparedness due to an inflated self-confidence. The assumption that they were untouchable led to a general attitude of apathy and laziness regarding potential threats.

ILLUSTRATION

There is a historical story about the capture of the city by the Persians under King Cyrus. Cyrus, at his wit's end, offered great rewards to anyone who could discover a weak area that would allow him to overtake the city of Sardis. As the story goes, one afternoon, a Persian soldier named Lagoras (not Legolas, that's Lord of the Rings) watched a Lydian soldier sneak down the back wall of Sardis to retrieve his helmet that had fallen. Deducing that a secret trail existed, Lagoras told Cyrus, whose army snuck up that little path at night, surprised the Lydian army, and conquered the city.

As we'll see, the spiritual state and attitude of the church in Sardis were not that far off from that of the city itself.

- There is a tremendous warning here to recognize the power and influence one's cultural context has in how one approaches their faith.

JESUS' INTRODUCTION

[Rev 3:1 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:

APPLICATION

Here we find two sevens, again representing the number of completion.

The seven stars represent the complete church (chapter 1). Jesus has possession over His church. But notice that hand in hand with the church is the Spirit of God.

Seven SPIRITS - It's not that the Holy Spirit is seven distinct persons. But rather, this probably indicates the sevenfold nature of the Holy Spirit's ministry, as found in Isaiah 11:

Isa 11:2 - The Spirit (1) of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding, The Spirit of (4) counsel and (5) might, the Spirit of (6) knowledge and of (7) the fear of the LORD.

This is interesting because, as we see, Sardis was a church in desperate need of a filling and revival of the Holy Spirit's life.

- We've been studying the ministry of the Spirit on Wednesday nights. Every time I study the subject, I become convinced that the church that quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit, will be nothing more than a shell. The church is not a religious social club governed by natural business models and structural charts. The church is a spiritual organism. Of course, there are physical implications and physical manifestations in the church. Still, underneath the hood, there is an engine fueled by spiritual horsepower, or should I say, "dove power" of the Holy Spirit.
- The Church of Jesus Christ is a beautiful entity, but it won't accomplish much spiritual good until they crank up and allow the power of the Holy Spirit in its midst. The church without the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit is a car without its engine, a musician without his instrument, a light without its electricity, a brain without its consciousness!

The first church had to wait before they acted on the mission that Christ gave them. They had to wait to be endued with power from on high... that is, from the highest place of God, they needed supernatural power to accomplish Christ's supernatural mission. Jesus made a promise, a promise that came from the Father that He would not leave those who believe in Him orphans, but that He would come to them in the third person of the triune nature of God, the Holy Spirit. I have yet to know God ever to break a promise!

But how would they know it's time? The answer from Jesus: WAIT. Before you go, you need to WAIT.

Why?

- The disciples had the best ministry seminary training available. Three years in the school of Jesus beats any doctorate from a seminary.
- They had experience. Jesus had given them a taste of ministry when he sent them out to heal the sick and cast out demons.

- They had a good team. There were a decent number of followers now that had gathered during Jesus' ministry.
- They were undoubtedly excited about and committed to the cause after experiencing the resurrected Jesus!
- *But apparently, education, experience, people, and passion were not enough to accomplish the mission. This is why they had to WAIT.*

1 Rebuke

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 - **"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**

APPLICATION

Jesus typically begins His letters with encouragement or recognition of something the church is doing well, but right off the bat, we see that there is a significant problem with the works of the church in Sardis. Whatever their works might have been, regardless of how those outside perceived them, Jesus saw them as lacking spiritual life.

- **I know your works** – again, Jesus emphasizes that He sees and knows all that we do. But here, we get a little deeper clarification into what Jesus sees. Not only does He see **what** we do, but he also sees **why** we do it. He sees our motives, and He sees and knows our hearts. He knows if we have been involved in genuine works of faith or just heartless religious activity.

That you have a name that you are alive– the word name here can be translated into our modern **English as "Reputation."** The church had a reputation for being alive. There must have been a form of life that was visible. The only way you get a reputation among others is that they observe something about you. If you're human, you very well know the temptation

to have the kind of faith that impresses others while forgetting to ask yourself the question, "What does God think about where I am spiritually?"

QUOTE

“ You could say...

"Everyone thought the church of Sardis was wonderful – but the Lord."

APPLICATION

This is probably a church that people talked about. They had many programs and ministries. They were relevant and had all of the catchy slogans and appearances. (Now, this doesn't mean that if people like a church, it is bad, or if people don't like a church, it isn't good. But the downside for the church in Sardis is that their reputation was not genuine, it was contrived.)

A good reputation doesn't always guarantee true spiritual life. Many people are more consumed these days with how people view them outwardly than how God views them inwardly.

- ***Many churches will go to great lengths to protect the visibility of their reputation, even to the extent of faking spiritual life so as to impress those around them.***

THE ATTITUDE OF SOME:

If I can impress people and give them the impression that I have it all together, it doesn't matter if I'm sincere. It doesn't matter if I'm actually close to Christ, as long as people think I am. It doesn't matter if what I portray doesn't match up with who I am as long as everyone has something good to say about me.

BUT WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT ME? IS THAT NOT THE MOST PAINFUL QUESTION THAT WE LOVE AS HUMANS TO AVOID?

Everyone wants people to think they are spiritual, but very few people actually want to be spiritual. Every church wants people to look at them and see a church that is, "making

disciples, spreading the gospel, worshipping God, etc..." but how many churches want to pay the price of actually doing it?

Joseph Bayly, the 20th-century author wrote this powerful observation,

QUOTE

“Jesus warned His disciples, we must beware of hypocrisy – pretending to be something we aren’t, acting with a mask covering our face. Hypocrisy is a terrible sign of trouble in our hearts – it waits only for the day of exposure. For as John Milton put it in *Paradise Lost*, ‘neither men nor angels can discern hypocrisy, the only evil that walks invisible – except to God.’”

Joseph Bayly

APPLICATION

The danger and temptation for many churches today is to create an image of themselves that doesn’t reflect who they really are.

- Creating images... hmmm. Do you know what the Bible calls creating images?
- IDOLATRY. Remember king Nebuchadnezzar? In Daniel 3 we are told that he created an image of himself for others to stand in awe of and worship. This was simply a self-inflated version of himself to create awe in the eyes of others.
- Hey, it’s ok for a church to have an image as long as it’s true and it is reflecting and lifting up Jesus, not making a name for a man or an organization. ***I WISH for churches to have good reputations. I hope our church has a good reputation. But not so people can praise how great the church is, but so people can say, “They are all about Jesus!”***

ILLUSTRATION

In the 1960s there was a con artist by the name of Frank Abignale Jr. The movie “catch me if you can” documents his story. By his 19th birthday, he had conned over \$4,000,000 by pretending to be an airline pilot, pediatrician, and even a lawyer. He successfully deceived all those around him in every case and became an expert at printing counterfeit checks. 4,000,000 dollars later, the only expertise he really mastered was the art of pretending to be someone he was not.

QUOTE

“ The moral of the story?

“Be careful about building a reputation that you can’t back up with your life.”

BIBLE PASSAGE

...But you are dead.

APPLICATION

Life is the qualifying factor.

- The church of the living dead is not the goal Jesus is going for! Christian zombies don’t fool God. They might fool those around them, but the Lord knows what goes on behind the scenes.

Here is the tragic irony of it all. In the physical world there is no way of fooling someone into thinking that a dead person is alive. It’s the same way when God looks at a heart or a church. **He either sees alive or dead... but we as people can’t distinguish so clearly.**

Also, think about it from Satan’s point of view. Why attack a dead person? A dead man holds no threat, so just let them be. Satan had no reason to mess with this church because they weren’t doing anything that would hinder him, to begin with.

QUOTE

“It is when the church’s leaders and members get accustomed to their blessings and complacent about their ministry that the enemy finds his way in.”

Wiersbe

APPLICATION

Paul tells us that when we offer ourselves to God, it needs to be as a “living sacrifice.” At first glance, those two words seem to contradict one another. A sacrifice is something that is dead right? In a sense, that is true.

To be an offering to God, to submit ourselves fully and whole heartily to His will, we first have to die to ourselves. It’s when we die to ourselves that we can genuinely live unto Christ.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Rev 3:2 NKJV] 2 "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

THE RESPONSE

He commands the church to do three things:

1. Watch out

2. Get strong**3. Hold on!****1. WATCH OUT**

“Be watchful” You remember the history of this city, right? The downfall of the city of Sardis was its attitude of complacency and lethargy. They grew overly confident in their defenses and started neglecting their weak points.

They were not fortifying the weak areas of the city. They were not preparing and training for an attack. They were not being watchful of their status.

I think this is why the church here is commanded to be watchful.

Both Peter and Paul tell us to **"be watchful in our prayers, for the end of all things is at hand."**

1Pe 5:8 NKJV - 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

CHURCH IN AMERICA, CHURCH IN SAINT JOSEPH... Are you watchful as though you are engaged in a spiritual battle? Are you watchful and aware of the times and last days that we live in? Are you watchful, anticipating the return of your Lord?

QUOTE

“...error, like disease and sleep, long holds fast those who come under its influence; but truth uses the word as a goad, and smites the slumberers, and awakens them; and when they are awake they look at the truth, and also understand it...”

Mileto of Sardis

2. GET STRONG

Strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die.

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. Sardis was at the “monument” stage, but there was still hope!

- There wasn't much time or opportunity left for this church. The timeline was grinning down. The fuse was nearing the bomb. Their spiritual health was so bad that they were numbed to how sick they had become. Their spiritual heart was about to give out.
- But, in the midst of it all, some things remained. Hearts that were still beating, even if faintly. Sparks of faith that hadn't gone out yet. There was an invitation to abandon what was fading away and focus on strengthening the remaining sparks by casting a vision of how they could be rekindled. That's what this church needed: the hope of a new beginning, and the courage to take action.

ILLUSTRATION

I am poorly attempting to garden. I think this year's attempt will go better than last year's... I plan on filling my garden box with plastic plants, fruits, and vegetables. That way, my Instagram pictures will communicate a high rate of success. I might even gain some new followers who think I'm a pro. Everyone who drives by will slow down to marvel at the beautiful fruit of my labor. Hopefully, they won't look too close, only to realize that nothing actually grows or changes.

Jesus would say, **"You've worked hard to create a plastic spiritual life, but nothing is happening. Throw away the plastic and take the soil that still remains, and some of the seeds you have, and start working on something authentic."**

3. HOLD FAST

[Rev 3:3 NKJV] 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.”

Remember how they received and heard. How did they receive and hear?

They received by faith, and they heard through the Word of God.

Receiving God's Word and living it out by faith... that's it!

REPENT - a movement towards Jesus.

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.

The consequences for un-repentance are announced. For those who don't respond, Jesus will come upon them suddenly! What does this mean?

- It could mean that Jesus will bring swift discipline upon them when they are least expecting it.
- It could be that because they are so focused on the world, the Lord's return will catch them off-guard.
- Again, in the city, this happened. They were comfortable and felt fortified, and yet their adversaries snuck in a back way completely undetected.

The picture of Jesus coming as a thief is familiar.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[1Th 5:2-10 NKJV] 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

When Jesus shows up, you want to be a bride that is prepared for that day.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Rev 3:4 NKJV] 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..

APPLICATION

Clothing holds significant imagery in the Bible. Jesus may be drawing off the imagery of Lamentations when the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem. In Lamentations, the people are described as wearing sackcloth and ashes.

Lam 4:12-14 NKJV - 12 The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem-- 13 Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just. 14 They wandered blind in the streets; They have defiled themselves with blood, so that no one would touch their garments.

Ancient Israel thought they, too, were secure. They ignored the truth, killed the true prophets in cold blood, and spoiled their garments with the blood of the saints.

Interestingly, In Revelation 19:7-8, Jesus is described as wearing garments dipped in blood. It's debated if the blood is his own, representing the work of salvation, or if it is the blood of those He judges. Perhaps it's both. Regardless, he's clothed with the robes of righteousness, and all those who are with him are clothed in white garments.

Additionally, Isaiah 61:10 speaks of a garment of salvation and a robe of righteousness as something that will be worn by those who trust in the Lord.

Isa 61:10 NKJV - 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Rev 3:5 NKJV] 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.

HE WHO OVERCOMES

1Jo 5:4-5 NKJV - 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Overcomers are those whose faith in Christ is proven genuine because they don't fold under the mounting pressures of the world and the devil against them.

APPLICATION

Clothed in White - righteousness

Not blot out names from the book of life:

1. Possibility 1 - the book that records every human being and their life (In your book all my days are written)
2. Possibility 2 - A book of those redeemed by faith in God's salvation.
3. It's very well could be that all are in the book of life, but they are removed from that book upon their rejection of God as He reveals Himself to them.

While I'm not 100% certain what the book is, I'm 100% certain that I want my name in it, and that my faith in Christ is what placed my name in it.

JESUS WILL CONFESS US BEFORE HIS FATHER

Mat 10:32-33 NKJV - 32 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

QUOTE

“It is important for us to accept Jesus. But it is far more important to know if Jesus accepts us.”

David Guzik
