



7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION

Seven Churches // Sermon 5

Sardis: The Dead Church // Revelation 3:1-6

If you have your Bible, turn with me to **Revelation.**

- We will be in **Revelation 3** this morning.

Imagine you live in Sardis.

- You wake up on a Sunday morning and prepare to go to church.
- You get dressed, arrive at church, and enter the worship gathering.
- You worship, you sing, you pray, and your heart is prepared for the sermon.

A guest preacher takes the stage and tells you he is there to deliver a message from the Lord, directly from the Lord.

- You check the validity – and it is from Him.

He begins to preach.

- He talks about Jesus and the supremacy of Christ in chapter 1 – you lean in.
- He rebukes the church in Ephesus for leaving their first love.
- He comforts the church in Smyrna for their suffering.
- He confronts the church of Pergamum for their compromise.

But Sardis knew none of this applied to them – their church had an excellent reputation – surely the Lord had good things to say about them.

- But when it comes time to hear the words of the Lord for them, the Lord says: **The appearance doesn't match reality.**

You look alive on the outside, but you are dead on the inside.

Big Idea: Jesus revives dead churches and dead hearts when we respond to His call.

There are three (3) truths I want you to see in this text:

1. Recognize the problem.

Jesus begins His letter with authority:

[1] “And to the angel of the church in Sardis (to the elders) write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Here comes the devastating diagnosis:

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

The Greek word for *reputation* means *name*.

- Sardis had a *name* for being **alive**.

They were known in the community as an active, vibrant church.

- **They had a proud history** – Great programs and right theology – everything looked good on the outside.

But Jesus wasn’t fooled. He looked beyond their reputation and said, “You are dead.”

- Not sick, not struggling...but dead.

This is a devastating diagnosis.

Let’s talk about Sardis.

- Sardis was once a strong and wealthy city – it was the preeminent city in Asia.¹
- It was powerful and influential.

By the time the first century rolled around, their best days were behind them.

- It was a shell of what it once had been.

The church mirrored the city – resting on its past reputation while its spiritual life had dried up.

How many of you remember “*the good ole days*”?

Pretending to be what we aren’t is a heavy burden to bear.

¹ <https://www.preceptaustin.org/revelation-3-commentary#1a>

**As a church, we would be remiss if we didn't pause here and ask:
What about us?**

- **Personally:** Do you have a reputation for life without the reality? Do people know you as a “good Christian,” but deep inside, you're cold and dry spiritually?
- **As a church:** Are we content with past success? More focused on reputation than reality?

Jesus isn't impressed with who we used to be – He cares about who we are today.

- The first step toward revival is honesty: recognizing the problem.²

Recognize the problem.

2. Respond with urgency.

Jesus doesn't just pronounce death; He gives a path back to life.

Notice the urgency in His commands:

[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.

Notice the five (5) imperatives Jesus gives:

A. [2] Wake up...

He says, “**Wake up.**” This means ***to be watchful, to be alert.***

- Twice in its history, Sardis was invaded because the guards failed to stay awake at night.

Jesus uses their own history to make a point: *Don't get caught sleeping spiritually. Stay alert before the enemy defeats you again.*

B. [2] Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die...

Jesus says, “There is still a spark remaining...it's a faint heartbeat...

- Fan it into flame before it dies.

C. [3] Remember, then, what you received and heard.

This refers to the gospel.

² Warren Weirsbe

- Go back to the gospel you once embraced.
- Revival always begins with returning to Jesus.

D. [3] ... Keep it

Don't just remember it; obey it. Live it out.

E. [3] ... and repent.

Turn away from complacency and sin and return to Christ.

Several years ago, Cayla and I drove through Las Vegas and stayed at a hotel.

- In the middle of the night, the fire alarm went off.
- I kept trying to power it off with the remote – but it wasn't working.

Eventually, people were yelling at me to wake up and get outside.

That's what Jesus is saying to His church.

- **Wake up!! Act before it's too late.**

Jesus adds a warning: *If you do not wake up and repent, I will come like a thief...*

- This is an image of sudden judgment.
- It's unexpected, sudden, and devastating.

What does it mean for us to “wake up”?

- **Personally:** It may mean confessing hidden sin. Maybe it means rekindling prayer and Bible Intake in your life? Maybe it's obedience to what the Lord is telling you to do?
- **As a church:** It means returning to the basics: prayer, gospel preaching, discipleship, and evangelism.

Ask yourself: Where do I need to *wake up*? Where am I spiritually coasting?

His call is urgent: The time to wake up is now!

Respond with urgency.

- 3. Rest in God's promises.**

Even in Sardis, all was not lost. Jesus says:

[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.'

Sardis was down, but they were not out.

- There were a “few” who had remained faithful.
- A few who had not “soiled their garments.” (They had not compromised.)

To them, Jesus gives promises of hope:

“They will walk with me in white” – This is a promise of purity – a purity that is not self-earned – it’s the purity of Christ covering us.

- To walk with Christ is to share in His holiness and to enjoy His presence forever.³

“I will never blot his name out of the book of life.” This is a promise of security - they are eternally secure in Jesus.

“Christ is saying that those who truly belong to Him will be acknowledged by Him forever. Their salvation rests not in their grip on Him but in His grip on them.”

– Richard Phillips⁴

“I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” This is the promise of honor - Jesus will declare our names before the Father.

- Jesus will stand before the Father and say, “He belongs to Me! He is Mine!”

It’s like Graduation Day.

- When your name is called, and you walk across the stage, you feel seen and honored – applauded.

How much greater when Jesus, the Son of God, declares your name before the Father and all of heaven?

³ *More Than Conquerors*, p. 74.

⁴ *Reformed Expository Commentary: Revelation*, p. 116.

This should encourage us and motivate us:

- **Encourage:** Even if the majority drifts, Jesus sees the faithful few. Maybe you feel alone or overlooked or weary – Jesus sees you! He promises purity, security, and honor!
- **Motivated:** Don't trade eternal promises for temporary reputation. Don't be content to look alive while dead on the inside.

The church in Sardis looked alive. But they were dead.

- Jesus called them to wake up, repent, and return.

Friends, appearances can deceive.

- A church can look busy, active, and vibrant on the outside – but be empty on the inside.
- A believer can look faithful while their heart is cold toward Jesus and His people.

The good news is this: It's not too late to turn to Him.

- Jesus specializes in resurrection.
- He revives the dead and gives new life to those who come to Him.

The question is – will you wake up, repent, and return?

Here are SIX signs of a dead church:

Adapted from Charles Swindoll⁵

1. **A dead church lives in its past.** *They constantly reflect on the good ole days.*
2. **A dead church is inflexible and resistant to change.** *They begin devoted to their habits and unwilling to follow where God is leading.*
3. **A dead church has leaders who lack fire.** *They lack hunger for God and prayerful obedience.*
4. **A dead church values division over unity.** *Gossip, grudges, and cliques begin to choke out gospel unity.*
5. **A dead church neglects the next generation.** *There's no intentional discipleship or investment in children and students.*
6. **A dead church lacks a real burden for the lost.** *They are unmoved by the reality of hell.*

Lord, help us not become a dead church.

⁵ <https://churchlinkfeeds.blob.core.windows.net/notes/39183/note-186821.html>