

Rev. 3:1-6: Sardis: Wake Up!

A series of movies were produced in the 1970s about the events in Revelation. The first movie was *A Thief in the Night* (1972) about the second coming of Christ. It is about a young woman who missed the Rapture and lived through the 7 years of tribulation. The sequels were *A Distant Thunder* and *Image of the Beast*. At the time I was a new Christian and these movies literally scared the - out of me. You can watch it on YouTube and see how we dressed in the 1970s. Jesus told Sardis he would come to the church like a thief in the night if the church did not repent.

Problem: Reputation of being alive, but dead

Sardis received the most severe denunciation of the 7 churches.

It had a reputation for being alive, but it was dead. The church had a reputation: (GR = *onoma* = a mere name or reputation). The church had a mere name without the substance, reputation without reality.

You go on vacation and choose a hotel with a 5-star reputation, but when you get there you discover the reality doesn't match the reputation; you realize it should have a 2-star reputation.

Church members were satisfied with the church's reputation, but Jesus saw the reality. The church had a reputation. It looked like a church with a church building and steeple. It had "Church" in its name. It had Sunday worship and sermons and sang hymns. It had Sunday school and was doing good work in the community.

Jesus saw the reality. Jesus evaluates with a different set of criteria than the people inside (members) and the people outside. Jesus' primary criteria would be obedience to the whole word of God, to his teaching and commands. Imagine a food critic evaluating an Italian restaurant solely on its building, tables & chairs, menu, ambiance, cooks, and waiters, but when he

orders from the menu the lasagna is served like it was frozen and warmed up in a microwave.

Do not go to a church just because it has "Church" in its name. What bears the name "Church" but is not a biblical church? (A biblical church is a church that is faithful to the Bible as the inerrant and infallible word of God?) Check the website of a church and look at its beliefs. The tab will say "What we believe?"

Here is an example of a church with a reputation as "Church" but it is dead. There are Unitarian Universalist Churches which have the name (reputation of) church but are spiritually dead. The website says UU Churches are atheist, agnostic, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Humanist, and Earth-Centered. They use the sacred texts of all religions (e.g. Hindu Bhagavad Gita, Islam's Qur'an). They believe the theory of evolution is real science (and climate change). They are proud to be WOKE and fully support worldly social justice and LGBTQ. They have Sunday worship services and sing hymns. It is instant lasagna warmed up in a microwave.

There are churches in every "mainline" Christian denomination that have become like Sardis. These denominations have liberal progressive churches that have become secularized. They compromise with the culture. The secularization and compromise always begin with the rejection of Scripture as God's timeless and authoritative standard of truth. They believe Scripture needs to change with the times and culture.

The difference between UU Churches and Sardis was Sardis still had some truth remaining; it had something that could be revived. UU Churches are completely DEAD. Mainline liberal progressive churches are dying.

The WOKE church is another danger! SBC is becoming woke.

Conclusion: Sardis was the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity. Inoffensive because the church had become completely secularized; it had thoroughly compromised with the pagan culture.

[Note: In the dispensational premillennial interpretation the 7 churches represent 7 ages of church history. The Sardis church represents the 5th church age, the Reformation age of the church (1520-1750). The Reformers like Martin Luther broke away from the Roman Catholic church, but their works were not complete. They splintered into state churches and fought religious wars. They murdered Anabaptists.]

3 Reason for being dead:

The church was dead. The GR word "dead" has nuances of meaning depending on the context: no longer devoted to or under the influence of; dead in respect to fruitlessness; spiritually dead.

3:2-3: 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. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.

First, Sardis had forgotten and was not keeping what it received and heard. This Revelation letter was circulated among the 7 churches. It was received by the churches and read aloud. Revelation 1:3: *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.* So, this "receiving and hearing" likely refers to the Gospel and other basic Christian teaching the church had received and heard from Apostles or other teachers before receiving and hearing Revelation. They did not have a complete Bible like we have. Without a Bible to read you would probably forget what you received and heard. You are receiving and hearing this sermon right now, but how much will you remember? You may walk out of here and forget everything you heard - unfortunately. Sardis was not faithful in keeping the truth of God's word it had received and heard.

Second, Sardis's works were not complete. If you fail to keep the Gospel, then your works will not be complete. This church was failing to accomplish its calling and mission which is Christ's Great Commission. (FCBC supports local and foreign mission work with Lottie Moon Christmas offering and Annie Armstrong Easter offering.) Every church also has a calling to be "salt

and light" in its local community by preaching the Gospel and doing good works. Salt and light also mean pastors and churches should be involved in influencing public policy; that's politics. Read Matthew 5:13-16.

Third, most Sardis church members wore soiled clothes (GR = *molyne* = stained or morally contaminated). This means they made sinful compromises with the world. ~ Tide did a series of commercials with a talking stain. Have you seen the funny commercial with the man doing a job interview with a big stain on his shirt. The interviewer stares at the stain as the stain loudly mumbles. It is a commercial for "Tide to Go" stain remover. "Silence the stain." Lesson: Your stained clothes will negate your witness. Silence the stain. Sin will make you a hypocrite and negate your witness for Christ.

A remnant in the church had not soiled their garments. The majority needed to repent for soiling their garments.

Solution: Wake (not Woke) up and repent

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.*

The order of commands: wake up, repent, remember, strengthen, and keep watch (guard). Sardis must remember and guard the Christian teachings they received and heard. This is called revival.

It is my interpretation that one important doctrine this church heard and received but had neglected was the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Rev. 22:20: Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon." The imminent return of Christ, or the Rapture, is strong motivation to wear clean clothes, not soiled garments.

Another reason for this assumption is the reference to Jesus coming like a thief at an unknown hour. The return of Christ is both rescue and judgment.

(The Rapture is a rescue before the 7 years of the great tribulation and then the second coming of Christ in judgment.)

Jesus will come like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44 & 2 Peter 3:10).

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6: *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.*

This scripture refers to the second coming of Christ in judgment upon the world. Jesus will return like a thief in the night at a time when people feel safe and secure.

This is the same word Jesus gave to Sardis. 3:6: *"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."* "Come against" here means to come against with hostility. So, Jesus will come against Sardis in judgment like a thief at an unexpected time. This may refer to a historical event or Christ's second coming in judgment known as "the Day of the Lord." The second coming of Christ doesn't depend on anyone's repentance, so this most likely refers to a historical event of judgment upon Sardis prior to Christ's second coming. Christ is always coming unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, to judge or revive a sleeping church.

If this refers to a historical event prior to the final "day of the Lord," then it may be related to the fate of the city. The city of Sardis had been destroyed by earthquakes several times. An earthquake will wake you up! (There are ten thousand of earthquakes and over 50 volcanoes erupting around the world right now!)

The Church of Sardis did eventually decline and disappear. Someone who visited Sardis wrote, "Ruins from a small, fourth-century Byzantine church stand on the grounds of the Temple of Artemis. I found the crumbling church—built a few hundred years after John's letter—to be a hopeful sign that some in Sardis took the warning to repent." There are no known Christians in Sardis today (only Turkish Muslims).

Reward

A threefold promise is given to the overcomer. Rev. 3:5: *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.*

1) He/She will be clothed in white garments. The white garments refer to either justification or resurrection bodies.

2) His/Her name will not be removed from the Book of Life. The "book of life" contains the names of people chosen by God. The names were recorded in the book of life before the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8). If your name is not written in the book of life you will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

3) Christ will confess his/her name before Father God and the angels. Jesus said (Matthew 10:32-33), "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Application: Wake up!

The main warning is "Wake up!" and repent. Strengthen what remains.

This Sardis church was on "cruise control" and falling asleep at the wheel. I put the car into cruise control at 70mph. There's a car down the highway in front of me at 65mph. I am getting closer and closer to that car. If I don't

wake up and tap the brakes and get out of cruise control then I will run into the back of that car.

Even churches with correct theology need to wake up and repent. Before I came here, I was helping a new church named Renew. We met in the gym of a large Baptist church that was dying. Florida Boulevard Baptist Church in Baton Rouge had 1000 in its prime. The neighborhood changed and became black, Hispanic, and Asian. The church shrank to 100 old members meeting in a large sanctuary. Renew Church used the gym. The pastor of Renew is white and his wife is black. Renew Church grew with black and white, Hispanic, and Asian (Sandie). After several months, the leaders of Florida Boulevard gave the facilities to Renew and renamed the church Renew. The leaders of Florida Boulevard had to wake up and repent. They strengthened what remained by giving it to Renew. Sometimes churches need to change the name and identity and restart with a new vision.

So, wake up! Repent of the sins of apathy and complacency.

Wake up and complete the deeds Jesus has given you to do.

Wake up FCBC and complete the deeds Jesus wants from this church.

Wake up and keep looking up. Wake up and stay awake. Every Christian should get up in the morning thinking "This could be the day of his coming!" or "The Rapture could happen today!" Always anticipate the coming of Christ. It's a strong motivation to keep your clothes white.

There is a saying, "If you are too heavenly minded, then you are no earthly good." I say, "The more heavenly minded you are, the more earthly good you will be."