**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 1-31-2021
To the Church in Sardis…**

I really love the song “My Hope Is Built.” It is a very good reminder that as Christians we are to find our hope and our confidence in Christ Jesus alone and in what He has done for us. I particularly am blessed by the line in the song which goes “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” These are such important words to live by.

But truly, there are so many other things that people can try to make their solid rock. It could be wealth or physical safety or a certain title or an achievement. But when we put our trust in them as our rock or foundation of our life, they disappoint us without fail. Christ alone is to be the only rock for humanity.

This song also reminds me a bit of the city of Sardis. Sardis was a city that was built as a military stronghold. There was a 1500-foot precipice that surrounded much of the city and it was easy to place one’s hope and security in the defensive nature of the city.

But interestingly, twice in the city’s long history did conquering armies scale the dangerous side of the precipice in order to bring a surprise attack against the city. The city thought they were in a secure position, but suddenly they realized that they were defeated.

On both of these occasions, if the defenders of the city were vigilant to the possibility of enemy soldiers offering a sneak attack, they would have likely easily prevented their city from being taken over.

With that in mind, let us turn to hear Jesus’ words to the Christians in Sardis found in Revelation 3:1-6.

**“To the angel[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A1-6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30748a)**] of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A1-6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30748b)**] of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

**4Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. 6Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

I remember one time hearing a Christian speak about how he loved how active his church was. Their church had a reputation of being a happening place.

But being active and having a reputation of being alive does not mean that it is actually alive and well. Jesus can tell the difference.

The Church in Sardis was a church that had a good reputation. Perhaps they were seen as nice people. But the difficult reality was that they were just going through the motions. They were not vibrantly alive for Jesus.

It appears that the majority of the church had fallen asleep. Maybe they showed up to worship each Sunday, but they were more going through the motions.

Jesus calls this church dead. That is quite a statement from our Lord. Jesus doesn’t give us extensive details about this church, but He does offer us some insights.

The first insight is in the way that Jesus greets them. Jesus states, **these are the words of him who holds the seven spirits[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A1-6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30748b)**] of God and the seven stars.**

What does this mean? The 7 spirits of God is a reference to God the Holy Spirit and the many ways that He empowers people. And the 7 stars speaks of all of Christ’s angels.

In other words, Jesus’ greeting to them is a reminder to these Christians that they needed Him and His supernatural help in order to be truly spiritually alive and vibrant for Him in this world.

A church is alive when it is living with Jesus as the head and living in ways that are dependent on the Holy Spirit.

\*\*I have heard it said that in many churches if the Holy Spirit left the building we wouldn’t know, because the people are not living in a dependence on the Holy Spirit’s power and direction.

As God’s people today, it is so important to remember that Christ alone is our rock on which we stand. And it is critical to consistently ask **“Holy Spirit, what are You saying to us? How are You leading us in this hour? We need Your power and Your grace to be alive for the Lord.”**

It appears that just as residents of the city of Sardis had a tendency to become overly comfortable and complacent, due to their city being naturally well-protected, ***the Christians there had a tendency to not be vigilant in defending their faith against our true spiritual enemy, Satan***.

Satan is a much cleverer enemy than any of the attacking armies that invaded Sardis. He attacks people’s minds with lies and deception. We must be vigilant. Many times, he lolls people into a spiritual sleep.

Perhaps someone begins their Christian walk all excited to follow Jesus and then he distracts their attention to someone else or something else.

Again, we do not know exactly what was happening, but the church thought that they were doing well because they had a good reputation, but they were barely alive.

Jesus tells them: **Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.**

I can picture someone just soundly sleeping and Jesus standing over them shouting “Wake up!”

\*\***The Church in Sardis actually reminds me a lot of many of the Pharisees whom Jesus dealt with**. The Pharisees were all concerned about their own reputation, but they had so fallen so spiritually asleep that they not only did not recognize their Messiah when He arrived, but they were even leading in trying to persecute Jesus.

Jesus’ words to the Pharisees can be summed up in two words. **Wake up!!** The self-righteous are harder to wake up.

Jesus also gives them another huge word of council. He says ‘**remember what you have received and heard, hold it fast and repent.’**

In other words, the Christians were to remember that they had received new life through faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn’t by their efforts; it was by God’s grace. They had heard the good news of Jesus and received Him. Jesus was telling them to hold it fast. Their hope must be built on Jesus once again.

For them to repent meant to turn back to the One who saved them from their sins. If we are not growing in Christ, friends, we are shrinking back. There’s no such thing as stagnant. We are either growing in our walk or are pulling away from Christ.

Jesus also told them that while many of the church needed to wake up and come to Christ again, there were those that continued to build that hope in Jesus.

Christ states: **Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.**

White is a symbol of purity and Jesus is saying that not only have some of His church in Sardis stated faithful and pure to Him, the invitation was still open to everyone.

And Jesus states that those that remain faithful to Him, He will never blot their names out of the book of life. It is possible to have one’s name blotted out of the Lamb’s Book of Life, if Christians turn their backs on Jesus.

Dr. David Dorsey, one of my former professors in seminary, mentioned a number of times that **“present godliness does not guarantee future godliness**.”

Friends, because the Lord blessed each of us with free will, we have the freedom to pursue growing in Christ and the freedom to fall spiritually asleep. Let us all always chose the former and not the latter.

Bringing this all together sisters and brothers, I just want to reiterate a few things to keep in our hearts as we reflect on this passage.

**First, while having a good reputation is not a bad thing, we are not to pursue this**.

Proverbs 22:1 does state, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

But the reality is, friends, that we are not to pursue a good reputation, but to pursue a life of faithfulness to Christ.

Or to put it differently, let us seek to have a good reputation with the Lord Himself. He is the only audience that really matters.

**Second, let us recognize our dependence on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide and empower us.** We need His help to be truly alive for Jesus in this world.

The Holy Spirit is eager to direct our steps when we look to Him and His leading in everything we do.

**And third and finally, never forget that our hope is in Jesus Christ and Him crucified for us**. Please do not place your hope in safety or wealth or even in political leaders, it is in Christ alone and in what He has done for us. Hold fast to your hope and know that as we do, Christ will acknowledge us before His Father and before His angels.

Thanks be to God.

Sources: BibleGateway.com

Revelation Commentary by Grant R. Osborne