



THE CHURCH AT SARDIS
Wake Up
Revelation 3:1-6

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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What is a church, and what is our church all about? I can answer that by reminding us of the glorious calling of Jesus Christ. The definition of a church and the identity of a Christian is Jesus! It is the Gospel – the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin, and the supernatural resurrection of Jesus from the dead, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. That is the Gospel, and that defines this church and that defines us.

To make it clear, we have identified three pillars that determine what we do as a church. The first pillar is **IMAGE**. Just as the potter shapes the clay, so the Lord shapes us. Romans 8:29 says, He “predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son.” Our destiny is to become more and more like Jesus. God is shaping us to look like Jesus and to live for Jesus. We use the IMAGE acrostic to give more detail of what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. For us, IMAGE paints a portrait of a disciple, and we are in the business of making and becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

We are also passionate about our families, and about building the faith of the next generation. So, the second pillar is **faith builders**. Deuteronomy 6 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might ... And you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:5-8). We are passionate about helping your family, your marriage, and your kids. Week after week, we teach preschoolers that God loves them. We show children how to become a Christian and how to use the Bible. We challenge teenagers to make Jesus the Lord of their life. This is a clear mandate from Scripture, and that’s why we are committed to building spiritually strong marriages and families.

The third pillar is the **mission**. Following Jesus includes living on mission. We are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to God. And we want to see people in our community come to know Him; our friends, our neighbors, and our co-workers. We believe Jesus is the answer, because we have experienced Him. As Peter and John said, “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). If we know Him, if He is real to us, if we truly love Him, we will not be able to stop talking about Jesus.

This is what a true disciple looks like. This is what a fully devoted follower of Jesus looks like. This is the glorious calling of Jesus Christ.

This calling of Jesus is to every person in this room. So, you’ve got to make up your mind. Is this the life you want to live or not? You’ve got to decide if you really want to follow Jesus. Because this is what it looks like.

And that’s why we are in this series called **First Love**. It’s about Jesus being the “first love” of your life. It’s about Jesus having “first place in everything” (Colossians 1:18).

In the book of Revelation, Jesus dictated seven letters to the Apostle John and instructed him to send those letters to seven specific churches. In those letters, Jesus encouraged each church and He confronted each church. As we've been studying these seven churches, we've been asking ourselves ... ***Could Jesus be saying this to us, as a church? Could Jesus be saying this to me?***

To one of the churches in Revelation, to Ephesus, Jesus said, ***"You have left your first love"*** (Revelation 2:4). What was true then is true today. We have a tendency to drift. If we're not careful, we become complacent, we compromise, we grow cold, and we just don't love Him like we used to. In His letter to the church at Sardis, Jesus confronted spiritual complacency. The Christians in Sardis were apathetic and indifferent. They had lost their passion and zeal. Their love for God had grown cold. And the tone of Jesus' letter was sharp and strong. He rebuked their complacency. And He pleaded with them and urged them to "wake up" and "repent."

If there is any drift or complacency in this room, then Jesus is speaking to us. So, what will it take to shake us out of our complacency? ***The only thing that will awaken a passionate love for Jesus is to remember His passionate love for us. The only thing that will awaken a passionate love for Jesus is the Gospel – remembering the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin, and His resurrection from the dead, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true.***

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

Revelation 3 begins Jesus' letter to the church at Sardis. "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this ..." (Revelation 3:1, NAS). The "seven Spirits" refer to the Holy Spirit and the "seven stars" refer to the seven leaders of the seven churches.¹ Jesus was saying, "I hold the Holy Spirit in My hand and it is up to Me to anoint your church with My presence and My power." The life of any church is in the hands of Jesus. Sadly, the church at Sardis had drifted far from Jesus, and was on the verge of dying.

Let me describe the city of Sardis. The Greeks were obsessed with athletics, games, and the physique. That gave rise to the Olympic games, the great competition to be the best. Each city had a gymnasium. This was the high school, where athletics played a bigger role than academics.

Sardis was also home to the temple of Cybele, the wife of Zeus and the mother of the twin gods Apollo and Artemis. Her cult worshiped with great festivals and immoral entertainment. Her servants were young males who castrated themselves, wore women's clothing, and took on a female identity. It was a temple devoted to transgender worship. The columns in this picture are 60 feet tall and 6 feet thick. Imagine the thousands of people who walked among these columns and committed the grossest acts of pagan worship.

The city of Sardis had gone back and forth between the hands of Greeks and Persians for generations. In 549 BC, the Persian King Cyrus conquered the city, and in 214 BC, Antiochus the Great took it back. And both times, the city was overrun because the people were asleep. When an enemy threatened the city, the citizens took refuge in a massive acropolis on the mountain. They

felt safe there, with supplies to survive for two years. They believed they were invincible, so they became complacent. And, two times in history, the city was conquered for their complacency.

And just like the city, the church had become complacent too.

Of the seven churches Jesus writes in Revelation, Sardis is the only church Jesus did not compliment. There was nothing to compliment about this church. Jesus said, “I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1, NAS). At one time, the church had a reputation as a bright light of faithfulness. But that time had long passed. Like a championship football team that hasn’t had a winning season in years. Or that once great company that went out of business. The church in Sardis was dead. And Jesus said, “Wake up” (Revelation 3:2).

I remember needing to assist Adam in waking up one morning when he was a teenager. We were all getting ready for work and school, except Adam. He was still in bed. And Kathy kept saying, “Adam, get up!” And after ten times, I thought he might need my assistance. So, I went into his room and picked up the bed and rolled him out of it. It worked. He woke up.

But there’s nothing funny about the tone of Jesus’ voice. This is a sharp rebuke. And His words are often sharp and strong. Because, as He said, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline” (Revelation 3:19, NAS). There is a sense of urgency in His words. Like a smoke detector going off in the middle of the night warning you to wake up and get out of the house. Like a tornado siren going off in the neighborhood warning you to take cover. Jesus was warning the church in Sardis, “Wake up.” And if we are complacent, He is warning us too.

Jesus said, “Wake up,” but notice the five verbs He used. “**Wake up**, and **strengthen** the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So **remember** what you have received and heard; and **keep** it, and **repent**” (Revelation 3:2-3, NAS). His rapid-fire cadence suggests urgency. Jesus said,

- “wake up,” because they were spiritually asleep
- “strengthen what remains,” because they were weak, lazy, and unfit
- “remember what you have received and heard,” because they had forgotten
- “keep” or obey, because they have neglected God’s laws
- “repent,” because they had drifted far from God

Again with urgency Jesus said, “Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you” (Revelation 3:3, NAS). We love to hear the gentle voice of Jesus, but to the church at Sardis, His words were sharp and strong. He rebuked them and confronted them. And He does the same thing to us. Jesus will discipline us when we drift into complacency. He will inflict any trial or pain or circumstance to wake us up, to get us to see how far we have drifted, and to get us to see how much we need Him.

This is a stinging letter. But as He does to each of the seven churches in Revelation, He promises reward for those who are faithful. “You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled

their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Revelation 3:4-5, NAS).

Those who are faithful, will, one day, walk with Him in white garments; representing the purity and righteousness we have in Christ. The names of those who are faithful will not be erased from “the book of life.” In ancient cities, if a person committed a severe crime, their name was erased from the city’s registry. Grace covers all our crimes, therefore, our names will be never be erased from His great book. And the next phrase is so humbling, and beyond imagination. Listen to what Jesus promises to those who are faithful. “I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” One day, Jesus will announce our entrance into heaven. One day, and He promises, He will introduce us, by name, to His Father and to all the angels of heaven.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:6, NAS).

WAKE UP

In light of that glorious day, when we will see Jesus face to face, and in light of the Gospel, His sacrifice on the cross for us, what a waste to allow ourselves to drift into complacency.

What does complacency really mean? It’s being easily satisfied. It’s settling for less than what is promised. It is the lack of passion and zeal. Complacency is neglect. It is an apathy and indifference that makes one vulnerable to unintended consequences. Complacency is an unguarded life and an unconscious soul. Perhaps the worst way to describe it is that complacency is looking at the cross and being unmoved.

Solomon wrote a proverb about the foolish man, or the complacent man. “I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins” (Proverbs 24:30-31, NIV). Complacency is like an overgrown house. Complacency is neglect, and this is a picture of the complacent soul. Complacency, apathy, indifference, a soul asleep. In combat zones, a common sign is “Complacency Kills.” It is to remind soldiers to be vigilant at all times. Because letting down your guard is when accidents happen or when attack may come.

How does it happen? How do we drift into complacency? There are a lot of reasons. The obvious reason is bad choices. When we sin, we turn away from God. And when we turn away from God, we drift away. And if we don’t repent, it’s easier to do it again, and we start to think “what’s the big deal?” Another reason is busyness. We get distracted. So many other things compete for our attention, and we let lesser things fill our lives and take over. Another reason some people become complacent in their faith is disappointment with God. When you’re going through a tough time, or when you feel like God has let you down, it is harder to trust Him and it is easier to become complacent. Religious activity is another reason. We can be involved in all sorts of religious activity, but when that activity replaces an intimate relationship with God, it is only a matter of time until we become weary and disillusioned and complacent. Perhaps the most common reason we become complacent is neglect. Less time with God, less time in His word, less

time pouring our heart out to Him in prayer. If we neglect Him for too long, our love for Him grows cold, and that's the definition of complacency.

That's not how God wants us to live. He has so much more for us. That's why the Bible urges to be "fervent in spirit" (Romans 12:11, NAS). The word "fervent" means boiling, or to live with great enthusiasm.² David had that boiling, enthusiastic love for God. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2, NIV). "I stretch out my hands to You; My soul longs for You" (Psalm 143:6, NAS).

I was listening to a recent message by Louie Giglio about renewing our spiritual passion. And after pouring his heart out, pleading with the audience, Louie gave these signs of true revival, signs of a truly passionate heart.

- an awareness of our great and glorious God
- a conviction of sin in the presence of a holy God
- a desire to see people all over the world come to know Jesus
- a boldness to tell people the story of Jesus

And then Louie said, if these things are not present in your life, then you remain in a state of spiritual complacency.

So what does it take to shake off our complacency? What does it take to renew our spiritual passion? I want to answer that in two ways – who and what.

Who do you need in your life to renew your spiritual passion? You can't do it alone. You need certain people in your life.

- You need someone who will ignite your faith, someone who will inspire you and stimulate your passion for Jesus.
- You need someone who is safe, someone you trust with whom you can be honest and vulnerable.
- You need someone who loves you, who will affirm you, and who really wants the best for you.
- You need someone who will tell you the truth, someone who will confront you and rebuke you when you need it.
- You need someone who will challenge you, someone who will push you and hold you accountable.

And **what** do you need to do to renew your spiritual passion. I went back to the writings of the Puritans for the answer, and I believe these habits are still true today. These habits must be present in our lives to renew our spiritual passion. This is what we must do?

- *Prayer* – And not just asking things of God. The Puritans viewed prayer as the ultimate act of humility. To them, prayer was bowing before God in utter dependence. Yes, God invites to ask Him for what we need. And yes, prayer is the way we pour out our hearts before Him. And, this humbling prayer is the way we express our utter dependence on God and how our spiritual passion is awakened.
- *Word* – You have to spend time in God’s word. You have to grab a Bible and grab a chair and spend time with God. The Bible is not just a book; it is the voice of God. And you’ve got to spend time listening to His voice in order know Him, to love Him, to understand His will, and to be shaped by Him. The prophet Jeremiah understand this. “When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight” (Jeremiah 15:16, NLT). That’s spiritual passion.
- *Church attendance* – To the Puritans, worshiping in community was proof that God was the Lord of your home. Worshiping with other believers, looking around the room and hearing other voices sing, inspires us. It inspires me to be with other people who love God too and to be with families who are putting God first. The illustration of coals in a fire makes the point. When the coals are stacked closely together, they all burn brightly. But when one of the coals falls to the side, what happens? It quickly cools off. And that’s what happens to us. When we are alone, our love for God grows cold; but when we are together, we heat each other up.
- *Repentance* – Another daily spiritual discipline of the Puritans was repentance. David’s prayer was their daily prayer. “Search me, O God, and expose anything in me that is offensive to You.” They lived with a dread of doing anything that would offend their holy God. That’s spiritual passion.

CONCLUSION

In His letter to the church at Sardis, Jesus confronted spiritual complacency. The Christians in Sardis were apathetic and indifferent. They had lost their passion and zeal. Their love for God had grown cold. And the tone of Jesus’ letter was sharp and strong. He rebuked their complacency. And He pleaded with them and urged them to “wake up” and “repent.”

The same thing that happened to the Christians at Sardis can happen to us.

So what will it take to shake us out of our complacency? ***The only thing that will awaken a passionate love for Jesus is to remember His passionate love for us. The only thing that will awaken a passionate love for Jesus is the Gospel – remembering the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin, and His resurrection from the dead, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true.***

So, this morning, we are going to remember the Gospel by serving Communion. Jesus said, “Do this is remembrance of Me.” The bread represents His body broken for us. The wine represents His blood shed for us. It all points to His passionate love for us. It all points to His grace, His willingness to forgive us of everything we’ve ever done wrong, a grace we did not deserve. Again, the only thing that will shake us from our complacency and awaken a passionate for love for Him is His passionate love for us.

NOTES

¹ See Revelation 1:20, where Jesus identified the “seven stars” as the angels of the seven churches.

² The Greek phrase for “fervent in spirit” is ζέω τῷ πνεύματι.