

Wake Up! – Rev. 3:1-6

Read vs. • Sardis' History

1. Jesus' ltrs to the 7 churches in Rev. 2-3 each contain personalized tib-bits that the people of each church would hear & say, "Hey – Jesus **knows** my city. He knows where I live & what's happened here."
2. That's especially true of THIS ltr – to the Church at Sardis.
3. So, I want to share a little about the **history** of Sardis, because Jesus **uses** that in what He says to them.
4. Sardis was located in a perfect spot.
 - a. People of the ancient world looked for 3 things when starting a settlement:
 - 1) Plenty of fresh water.
 - 2) Good soil for crops.
 - 3) And place that was easy to defend against attack.
 - b. Sardis had all 3.
 - 1) The Pactolus River flows through –
 - 2) A wide, flat valley of rich fields.
 - 3) And a hill with steep sides & flat top provided a prime place for a refuge.
 - c. So Sardis became a prosperous city that dominated its region.
5. But what kicked it into high gear was when **gold** was found in the river.
 - a. It set off a boom that saw Sardis become fabulously rich.
 - b. The legend of **Midas**, the king whose touch turned things into gold, comes from Sardis.
 - c. It's King **Croesus** used the gold collected from the river to make Sardis a sumptuous center of luxury.
 - d. He also built massive walls all around the city; making it impregnable.
 - e. There was so much gold produced in Sardis they had to find a way to measure & transport it and came up with the idea of **coins**.
 - f. So, in a way, the concept of **money** started there at Sardis.
6. The Persian King Cyrus the Great conquered this region in the 6th C. BC.
 - a. When he arrived at Sardis, he laid in a siege.
 - b. 2 weeks later when it was clear Sardis would outlast the Persians besiegers Cyrus promised a huge reward to any soldier who could figure out a way to take the city.
 - c. A couple days later, a Persian ambitious for the reward was scouting the hillside for a way up.
 - d. It looked so steep it seemed to be a suicide mission to scale the hill.
 - e. The Sardian soldiers could just shoot arrows down on them as they climbed up.
 - f. But this Persian watched as one of the guards took off his helmet and set it on the wall.
 - 1) A bit later he accidentally bumped it & sent it over the wall, where it rolled down quite a ways behind some boulders.
 - 2) The guard looked over & watched it roll, noting where it ended up.
 - 3) Then he disappeared & was gone for a while.
 - 4) When he re-appeared at his post, low & behold, his helmet was on his head!
 - 5) The Persian watching all this realized there had to be **both** a secret door in the wall, as well as a path down, and so up, the hillside.
 - g. That night being a full moon, he gathered a small group of other soldiers and led them to the place where the helmet had rolled to.
 - 1) Sure enough, there was a little path leading up to the walls and a cleverly hidden door in the wall.
 - 2) They assumed it would be locked; the city being under siege and all.
 - 3) But as they pushed it, they found it open!
 - 4) They prepared to battle the guards that must be waiting just inside – but as they slipped into the city, there was no one there.
 - 5) No one was guarding the door.
 - 6) And there didn't look to be anyone watching the walls.
 - h. So they quietly made their way through the streets to the front gate where they opened them to Cyrus & the waiting Persian army.
 - i. The City fell with little loss of blood or life.
7. The Sardians were so confident in their reputation as an unconquerable city, they hadn't bothered to post a

night guard.

- a. They assumed their walls and reputations was enough to protect them.
 - b. And their immense wealth w/all the luxury it bought had **softened** them so they valued **sleep** more than safety.
8. Their defeat by the Persians was a major embarrassment.
 9. But they soon got over it as they settled into a new routine under a new ruler.
 10. And 200 years later, then the **Greeks** came through the area, it happened all over again.
 - a. The Greeks laid siege to the city.
 - b. And one night a Greek soldier who was scouting the hills found a path that led to a secret door.
 - c. There was no one watching the walls and Sardis again fell without much of a fight.
 11. With that as our background, let's take a look at what Jesus says to this Church . . .

V1

¹ “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the 7 Spirits of God and the 7 stars:

1. Since the word angel means messenger, it's best to see this ltr as addressed to the pastor of the church at Sardis.
 - a. He'd read it to the congregation,
 - b. And be the one responsible for applying any instructions Jesus gives.
 2. As in each of the 7 ltrs, Jesus identifies Himself by a part of the vision the Apostle John had had of Jesus in His glory in ch. 1.
 3. Here, Jesus says He's the One in Whom dwells the **fullness of the Spirit**.
 - a. That stands in contrast to **this** church which **lacks** the Spirit.
 4. And He's the one Who holds the 7 stars.
 - a. We'd best go back & read the last v. of ch. 1 to see what the 7 stars represent
- Rev 1:20 • The mystery of the 7 stars which you saw in My right hand, & the 7 golden lampstands: The 7 stars are the angels of the 7 churches, and the 7 lampstands which you saw are the 7 churches.
- b. In the vision John had of Jesus, He saw Him walking in the midst of 7 golden lampstands which represent the 7 churches of chs2-3, & holding 7 stars, symbols of their 7 pastors.
 - c. The idea is that Jesus in IN His church and knows what's going on.
 - d. The pastors are His agents, bringing His message in The light of His Word.
 - e. The pastor of the church at Sardis needed to be reminded that the Church belongs to Jesus and that he's there to do His Lord's bidding; not pursue his own agenda.
5. As we'll see, it Church at Sardis had forgotten all this.
 6. They'd lost touch with the reality that **It's All About Jesus!**
 7. Still in v1, Jesus launches into an analysis of the church. It's not pretty.

I know your works,

- a. In the previous 4 ltrs, Jesus commends something before getting to the correction.
 - 1) Years ago I attended a course when I was in restaurant management.
 - 2) It was how to give a performance appraisal.
 - 3) We were told to use the Hamburger method.
 - a) A hamburger has a bun w/a top & bottom and the meat in-between.
 - b) So, you start off with a review with something **positive** – a **commendation**.
 - c) Then you get to the meat; where they're falling short, & what they need to improve.
 - d) And you finish w/**another positive** remark.
 - b. Jesus doesn't use the hamburger method here.
 - c. This is a burger protein style; No bun – all meat.
 - d. There's just **nothing** to commend here. It's . . .
- “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.
8. They had a **reputation** for being a good church, but that's **all** they had A Rep.
 9. There was no substance, no reality behind the report.
 10. Take note:
 - a. Jesus doesn't ding them for cooling their affection for Him as He did at Ephesus.
 - b. He doesn't dock them for moral & spiritual compromise as He had at Pergamos.

- c. He doesn't call them out for tolerating false teaching as at Thyatira.
- 11. This was a church that LOOKED good. >> But its **appearance** was **deceiving**.
- 12. Drive thru the area & take note of all the church buildings.
 - a. Cruise around & count how many little churches you find.
 - b. Seems like every street has at least a couple.
 - c. They all have signs out front; many with "Jesus" or "Christ" on them.
 - d. Jesus >> The One Who rose from the Dead to live forevermore. The giver of Eternal Life.
 - e. A church that takes **His name** as part of **their name** ought to be capital-A = Alive!
 - f. Some are! But a bunch aren't & haven't been for years.
 - 1) On a Sunday morning, no more than a dozen people are scattered across a room that seats a couple hundred.
 - 2) Then there's the church down the street that's **packed**.
 - a) The parking lot is full & the chairs are filled.
 - b) The music is pro & the message is thrilling.
 - c) But it's as **spiritually** dead as the place down the street with a dozen frozen chosen –
 - d) Because the Jesus that's on their sign is not IN their service.
- 13. I know this sounds harsh; but look at what Jesus said to the Church at Sardis
You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.
- 14. Over the years at CCO, we've had a handful of people who've visited & then said we're a dead church.
 - a. When I ask why they think so, they say because the gifts of the Spirit aren't in operation.
 - b. They want to **see** people being slain in the spirit & **hear** people speaking in tongues & giving prophecies.
 - c. Because they don't see or hear these things, they say we're dead.
- 15. We believe in the gifts of the Spirit; and they are in operation, all the time.
 - a. But no, we don't turn our services over to them because we try to follow Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 14 that all things ought to be done decently and in order.
 - b. And no we don't knock people down when praying for them because that isn't in the Word.
- 16. I know we're alive & Jesus IS in our service because lives are changed for the glory of God!
 - a. Lost souls are repenting of their sin & being saved.
 - b. Marriages are being put back together against all hope.
 - c. Broken relationships are being restored & broken hearts are being healed.
- 17. The Spirit IS here & working – powerfully!
- 18. But what Jesus says here is STILL an important challenge for us.
- 19. And I believe it's an urgent caution for some of you.
 - a. In a church this size, there's a chance there's someone who thinks they're good w/God because they've always gone to church.
 - b. Or when the survey comes & they have to pick a religious affiliation, they tick "Christian", because, well – they're not a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, & certainly not an atheist. So they're a Christian by process of elimination.
 - c. Or maybe you understand that religion plays an important part in the life of a good person; & you are – so you go to church to pay your religious dues.
 - d. Or maybe you're in a program that **requires** you to go to church, & you figure, as long as you have to be here, you might as well smile & get along. It's less painful that way.
 - e. I could go on. But the point is this Is all this RELIGION to you, or RELATIONSHIP?
 - f. Is it about Church, or Jesus?
- 20. Collectively, I don't think Horizonte is Sardis. But it **could** be.
 - a. You see, the people of Sardis had it pretty good.
 - 1) They were affluent; & used to the good life their wealth bought them.
 - b. The people of the Church there **weren't being persecuted**.
 - c. Their Faith wasn't really costing them anything in terms of the culture.
 - d. It just wasn't difficult being a Christian in Sardis.
 - e. And the laid-back attitude of the CITY carried over into the Church.
- 21. There's something I haven't mentioned yet about Sardis.

- a. There was a huge temple to the goddess Artemis there.
 - b. We already talked about the magnificent temple to Artemis in Ephesus.
 - c. The 1 in Sardis wasn't as grand, but it played an **even more important** role in the life of the City.
 - d. Artemis was their chief deity; the Mother Goddess they attributed their immense wealth to.
 - e. To show their loyalty, every woman of the city had to dedicate herself for several months of her young adult life as a ritual prostitute.
 - f. And it was the duty of all the men to visit them, paying the requisite fee to "worship" Artemis.
 - g. Sardis was a sex-saturated society; rationalized & excused under the banner of being loyal.
22. In many ways, this society is a re-heated version of ancient Sardis.
- a. We're affluent & being a Christian doesn't cost us much.
 - b. Hey, and we're served by a whole smorgasbord of church options.
 - c. If we don't like it here, we can go there, & try that for a while until we hear something we don't like, then we'll go someplace else.
 - d. And the culture is obsessed with sex.
 - e. Christians who desire to hold to a Biblical morality are pressed to be loyal to the liberal ideals of a false tolerance. The claim is, that's what's made our nation great.
 - f. It's gotten to the point now that refusing to go along with the world's crazy ideas about sex is seen as disloyal & dangerous to a free society!
23. Any church that capitulates to the culture forsakes its call to be holy.
24. The Holy Spirit won't stay in a church that doesn't want to be holy.
25. And when the Spirit leaves, death comes.
26. The parking lot & seats may be full – but that church is dead, as far as Jesus is concerned.

V2

- 1. So Jesus says –
- ² Be watchful, & strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.
- 2. For the Sardians, those first 2 words **had to sting**.
 - a. They well-knew their history & the 2 times their city fell because no one was watching.
 - b. Jesus says the church has slipped into the same dangerous place.
 - 3. And as deplorable as their spiritual condition was, it wasn't **hopeless**.
 - 4. Things could still turn around, but they must act **quickly**.
 - 5. That word "perfect" means **complete**.
 - a. Jesus didn't demand **perfection**; that they be **without flaw**.
 - b. He means they hadn't set themselves to **go on in grace INTO spiritual maturity**.
 - 6. They saw their faith in Jesus as "fire insurance."
 - a. They'd taken Him as Savior, but not Lord.
 - b. They'd been born-again, & were content to remain spiritual infants.
 - c. They'd gotten off to a good start, but stopped.
 - 7. Jesus' warning reveals an important axiom: If we aren't moving forward, we're drifting back.
 - a. There's just no standing still in our walk w/God.
 - b. The HS is on mission in us to conform us to the image of Christ.
 - c. **WE** must yield to the Spirit to take us **into** that image.
 - d. If we **resist** Him, our old nature will reassert itself & take over.
 - 8. Christian: Please hear this—Do you **long** to grow up in grace?
 - a. Do you ache to be more like Jesus? // Do you ask God to change you?
 - b. Or have you settled in where you are & decided you've gone as far as you want w/Jesus?
 - 9. At Sardis, the HS had convicted & won them to faith in Christ. They'd been born again.
 - 10. They were going to get into heaven. But they balked at heaven getting into them.
 - 11. And the HS was bummed. In Eph. 4:30 we read
Do not grieve the HS of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
 - 12. That's EXACTLY what they'd done in Sardis; grieved the Spirit.
 - 13. Jesus' words prove it. They are dead; & the Spirit is about to go. So Jesus says
Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die

14. When we go back-packing, we try to light a campfire with a single match.
 - a. We gather pine needles & tiny twigs. Light the match & hope it catches.
 - b. But the air is thin and often times the kindling is damp.
 - c. The flame of the match catches, but after a first little flare, it drops to just a glowing ember & a lot of smoke.
 - d. But there's a trick to get it going: blow on it!
 - 1) Not hard because that puts the ember out.
 - 2) A gentle puff; enough to get a little more oxygen to that glowing ember.
15. That's the picture here. The fire has gone out in Sardis.
 - a. All that's left is a glowing ember & smoke.
 - b. They need Jesus to blow on them and rekindle their faith.
 - c. But they must want it. They must ask.

V3

^{3a} Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

1. Their key to their turnaround is to **remember** how they got started.
 - a. They'd heard the Gospel, repented of their sin, & put their faith in Jesus.
 - b. Jesus is telling them to go back & **renew** THAT.
2. When married couples go through a rough patch, they often come out the other side w/a re-commitment to one another & the marriage.
 - a. To mark that – they will often renew their vows.
 - b. Couples who've been married for yrs & things are great, renew their vows.
 - c. When they do, they go back in their memory to their wedding when they were younger.
3. THAT's what Jesus calls for here. Start again!
4. "Don't just keep playing this religious game. Make it real! Make it about Me" He says.

^{3b} Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, & you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

5. He dings them yet again w/a reference to their embarrassing past & calls them to "Wake-up!"

V4

⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; & they shall walk w/Me in white, for they are worthy.

1. The pagans had a rule when they went to the temples of their idols
2. Wear your best & cleanest clothes // No one was admitted who wore dirty or ragged duds.
3. As Jesus examines His church in Sardis, while the people **look** good; spiritually, it's like they've just emerged from a muddy Rugby scrum.
 - a. What Jesus sees is embarrassing. They're a ragged mess!
 - b. And note this: While in the previous 2 churches, Pergamos & Thyatira, only a **minority** had erred,
 - c. In Sardis, it was only a few who **hadn't**.
 - d. All their religion was like spraying cologne on a corpse.
4. In Jude 23, a "defiled garment" is code for the sins of the flesh.
 - a. Their refusal to walk in the Spirit meant the Sardians were in the flesh.
 - b. And that meant capitulating to the world.
 - c. That accounts for why they weren't being persecuted;
 - d. For why the enemy wasn't harassing them with false teachers.
 - e. They presented no threat to him. Best to let the sleeping dog lie.
5. While the majority in the church there were clueless; **there were a few** who got it.
 - a. They walked in the Spirit. They yearned to go deeper in grace; further/Jesus.
 - b. **THEY** were the very ones most inclined to **hear & heed** these words from Jesus.
 - c. He knows who they are. And He sees their loyalty in the midst of a dead church.

Vs5-6

⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, & I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father & before His angels.

1. This promise is for those who overcome by following thru on what Jesus just said to do.

2. White meant 2 things; **Purity & Victory**. Both are in view here.
3. This promise of white garments is the promise of our **final victory over sin**.
4. Sin will be no more; neither it's deceptive appeal nor its bitter, death-dealing result.
5. And our names won't be expunged from the Book of Life.
 - a. That Book holds the names of all the saved, all those destined for eternal life.
 - b. Here's another passage that has to be understood in the light of that time.
 - 1) In the ancient world, **citizenship** wasn't based on your nation or kingdom; it was determined by your city. It's where the **word** comes from. [Is the word for citizenship & city similar in Spanish?]
 - 2) Every city kept a **registry** of its citizens.
 - 3) Their name in the book meant they had all the rights of citizenship in that city.
 - 4) But if someone did something dishonorable, something to bring shame on the city, their name was removed from the registry.
 - c. The reward for overcomers is **full citizenship** in heaven.
 - d. More than that: Jesus will **personally announce** our names in heaven to the Father & all the angels so they know we belong there.
- ⁶ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '
6. We've covered a lot today.
7. All I can say is: This passage has challenged me in 2 ways . . .
 - 1) First; as a **pastor**.

The culture here and where I live is an awful lot like that of ancient Sardis.
So I have to consider the very real possibility what Jesus said to Sardis may apply to our church in Oxnard & U need to consider if it applies here.
 - 2) Second; this letter provokes me **personally**.

I never want to slide into spiritual autopilot.
There's heaven. I go to church & am a moral person. I can just coastCoast.