

## **WAKE UP!**

### **Revelation 3:1-6**

#### **(Read Revelation 3:1-6)**

**Intro:** No matter how much of an early bird you are, there is always someone else who is earlier. My hilarious Aunt Avis, one of my mom's older sisters, was an early riser. That's fine. Getting out of bed early is a great way to get a jump on your daily to-do list – as long as you're quiet about it. Aunt Avis was prone to show up at our house at the crack of dawn or call on the phone before the chickens were awake. Her philosophy came through loud and clear in what she said one time when she called our house before 6 AM. My mother picked up the phone and when she heard it was Aunt Avis (this was 40 years, at least, before caller ID was invented) exclaimed, "Avis! It's not even 6 o'clock yet!"

And Aunt Avis replied "If you're not awake, you should be!"

The Church in Sardis was not awake and they should have been. They were asleep at the wheel. The message Jesus had for them was WAKE UP!

Sardis was a city that should have been safe from conquering armies, since it was situated on a low mountain with thousand foot cliffs surrounding it. But twice in its history it had been conquered because its inhabitants left their guard down as they rested in the false sense of security those walls atop the cliffs gave. Jesus is laying the charge of the same kind of laxity on the Christians who lived there.

David Guzik tells us that Sardis was *a city well known for its softness and luxury and its well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality*. Like Thyatira, the church we looked at last week, the Church in Sardis enjoyed an almost trouble free existence. Unlike Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, who experienced extensive persecution for being Christ Followers because they stood in opposition to the imperial cult and refused to worship the emperor, the Christians of Sardis had little more to worry about than where the party was this week.

Sardis was the Las Vegas or Atlantic City of the first century – it had the reputation of being a sin city even in a culture characterized by sin. The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of Sardis notoriously soft and pleasure loving. William Barclay describes the church this way: *"The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of the decadence."*

That's a dubious distinction and the bad thing was, instead of being a light in a dark place and making a difference, the Church in Sardis had dropped its guard and were in danger of being conquered by an evil culture. They were sleeping blissfully as the enemy crept in and, for that reason, Jesus has nothing good to say to them. In the four letters we've looked at previously, the message from Jesus begins with praise in three of the letters, after which Jesus turns the discussion with BUT, I have this . . . Not with Sardis. There is no praise for this church – only a warning wake up call. But all is not lost. Wake up and up and become conquerors. Turn the tide of the battle.

This is fortunate and there's a lot to learn here. First . . .

#### **This is God speaking**

- *The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars*. Revelation 3:1b. This may be a letter penned by the Apostle John, but these are the very words of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the one who has the seven spirits and seven stars. He has the authority to recall the Spirit from the church. If you don't use it, you lose it. There is a clear warning here: don't take the Holy Spirit for granted.
- And don't forget, Jesus knows our works. He sees, and what he sees is . . .

#### **Your good reputation is giving you a bad reputation**

- *I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive*, Revelation 3:1c. They appeared to a happenin' fellowship. Vance Havner writes, *"We are not to get the impression that Sardis was a defunct affair with the building a wreck, the members scattered, the pastor ready to resign. It was a busy church with meetings every night, committees galore, wheels within wheels, promotion and publicity, something going on all the time. It had a reputation of being a live, wide-awake, going concern."* (End Quote)
- You can seem to have it all together and, in truth, be on the verge of collapse. That was definitely the case here – Jesus minces no words – **BUT YOU ARE DEAD**. Revelation 3:1c. Ouch!

- We've seen this throughout these letters during this study – *God is watchin', watchin' over you!* And it can seem creepy if you're the paranoid type. But if you think about it, he's watching because he loves us and wants us to be on the right path and to be helping others onto the right path. So it's comforting to know Jesus saw the Church in Sardis for what they really were. So, he's pointing out that a good reputation is no guarantee for what our hearts truly reveal. Despite their good reputation, they are actually dead. So, Jesus tells them . . .

### **Wakeup before I show up**

- He will show up like a thief. But notice, there's hope – Jesus is giving them a chance. Guzik makes a great point here and it is a timely warning for the American Church – and yes – we are part of that American Church. Here's Guzik: "*Dead: this indicates no struggle, no fight, no persecution. It wasn't that the church at Sardis was losing the battle. A dead body has lost the battle, and the fight seems over. In this letter Jesus didn't encourage the Christians in Sardis to stand strong against persecution or false doctrine, probably because there simply wasn't a significant danger of these things in Sardis. Being dead, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan's domain, so it wasn't worth attacking.*" (End Quote). John Caird adds this, "*Sardis was a perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.*"
- How is that for a description? I mean I don't think we should go around trying to make people mad – that serves no purpose and it's just wrong. But neither does standing for nothing in the face of a deteriorating culture and allowing it to infiltrate the Church. The Bible means what it says and we need to believe it and follow it or we're dead.
- In three of the four churches we've looked at over the previous four Sundays there was prominent mention of Satan, but in the case of Sardis, he's not even worried – they were doing nothing without his assistance, freeing him up to apply his efforts to the other 6 churches. This is a sad message and it's what Keith Green was getting at when, in his song *No One Believes In Me Any More*, Satan taunts us with
 

*Still my work goes on and on  
Always stronger than before  
I'm gonna make it dark before the dawn  
Since no one believes in me anymore  
Well, now I used to have to sneak around  
But now they just open their doors  
You know, no one watches for my tricks  
Since no one believes in me anymore*
- Sardis, and the American Church – all of us, not just the liberal ones or the conservative ones that are more interested in what Tucker said this past week than about their neighbors who need Jesus; ALL of us are in danger of dying in our sleep if we get complacent.
- But there's hope. Jesus tells them . . .

### **Conclusion: Remember what you were taught and go back to it.**

- *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.* Revelation 3:3. Oh, it's a grim warning but, even so, there is a promise. Jesus isn't allowing sleeping dogs to lie – he is saying Wake up and repent!
- Jesus then encourages the ones who have not been caught sleeping. *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. 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.* Revelation 3:4-5 Guzik writes, "*Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a few names. In Pergamos (Revelation 2:14) and in Thyatira (Revelation 2:20) there were a few bad among the good; in Sardis there were a few good among the bad.*"
- No matter how prophets of doom try to predict it, the Church will never be defeated. There is always a faithful remnant. Over the course of Holy History, when the church has seemingly lost its way, there have always been faithful Christ Followers who have stood for Jesus – even when they were martyred for their

faithfulness. But it shouldn't be a just a remnant – we should be an alive and fully awake multitude of the faithful. Let's not rest on our laurels and fall asleep. Let's wake up and be conquerors. Amen.