

SARDIS

BRIEFING | Sardis does not exist today. In fact, of all the 7 churches, Sardis and Laodicea are the only ones that don't exist. However, Sardis had a rich history including; power, wealth, and prominence

ECONOMY & WEALTH | Sardis was the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, strategically located on the communications route between Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum. It was famous for affluence and creative culture, such as arts and crafts, and was the first to mint gold and silver into coins.

POWER & ARROGANCE | Sardis was the home of King Croesus who was legendary for his wealth, prosperity and arrogant pride. In fact, Croesus' arrogance contributed to the destruction of his kingdom when he preemptively attacked the Persian armies.

DOWNFALL | Sardis sat high on a plateau, protected by ridges up to 1500 ft high, which created a sense of security and complacency. However, in 549 BC, one of Persia's soldiers figured out how to climb the highest ridge (by watching a Lydian soldier!) and staged a surprise attack. It was as though Sardis wasn't even paying attention – like they were asleep. Over 300 years later, the Syrians did the same thing! This may be why Christ says "Wake up! (Revelation 3:2) People of Sardis would have understood this well.

DEVASTATION | In AD 17, an earthquake destroyed the city. Rome sent relief aid; but the city, now saddled with debt, never recovered.

THE SLUMBERING CHURCH

This week, we will continue our study by exploring the letter written to the church in Sardis. This was the fifth letter of the 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Sardis lived in the past. It had a reputation for wealth, affluence and culture; but after the big earthquake in AD 17, it was reduced to nothing. They tried to prop up their reputation for life and vibrancy, but they were dead and dependent on Rome. It appears that this church had no lack of money, resources or talent. They weren't experiencing serious persecution, and they had no issues with false doctrine. On the outside, everything seemed fine – perhaps even thriving. But Jesus says, **"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead...I have not found your deeds complete" (Revelation 3:1-2)**. This seems to be a form of spiritual sleepwalking – people who look awake but whose souls are asleep. When we spiritually sleepwalk, our heart is asleep, but our mind and body go through the motions. Jesus says, "Wake up!" He doesn't just want our energy; he wants devotion in your heart to him. He hates when we do things - even good things – just to look good for others.

Revelation 3:1-6

¹To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits 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.

FOCUS ON THE PASSAGE

In this text, Sardis receives both praise and correction from Jesus. It appears that they lacked nothing, they were not under persecution, nor were they accepting false doctrines in their church. The Church in Sardis was active, and even seemed busy! There was an energy people loved to be a part of. The other churches in the area may have looked at them with admiration. Therefore, Jesus' words can seem shocking! Sardis was full of respectable (but ultimately disobedient) Christians. They were spiritually complacent, working more to maintain their reputation than to serve God.

Q: *Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Sardis?*

Q: *How is this city different from previous churches we've studied?*

Q: *What's unique about this town?*

When we can understand what the church of Sardis was up against, we can see how Satan attacked that church and even crippled it. This was a city known for creativity and luxury living, but was destroyed because of arrogance. This could also describe many cities and countries in our time as well.

Q: *What are your initial impressions of this church*

FOCUS ON CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Sardis, he's described this way:

“The words of him who holds the 7 spirits of God” (Revelation 3:1).

This description of Christ may seem odd to us, but in the Bible the number 7 represents completeness or fullness. So the “7 spirits of God” represents the fullness of the Holy Spirit himself.

Q: *Why would this church need to be reminded about the fullness of the Holy Spirit?*

The Spirit is the one who makes the church alive. Since the Church is dead, it needs a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, so the power and authority of Christ can once again shine in that dark place.

John Stott writes, “So Jesus reminds the Church of Sardis that...Christ has the Holy Spirit...it is He who can animate our dead works and make them pulsate with life. He can rescue a dying Church and make it a living force in the community.”

Notice how the Spirit of God is at work in us. Without the Spirit's work in your life, you are powerless to change.

Stott concludes, “He dwells within you; but does he fill you? You possess Him; but does He possess you?”

Q: *How would you answer John Stott's questions - does Christ fill you; does He possess you?*

Q: *How could you work towards growing in this area.*

As leaders we often have to help people understand what it looks like to hear from the Holy Spirit, be led by the Spirit vs. doing things in our own flesh.

Here are some supportive scriptures:

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

1 Corinthians 2:13

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Ephesians 1:17

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

The Church of Sardis doesn't receive praise; they are quickly corrected.

Q: *However, reading between the lines, what had been good in their past?*

Q: *What was once going right in Sardis?*

Q: *What was wrong?*

Q: *What was missing?*

Q: *What would the outcome be if they didn't 'wake-up'?*

They had at one time heard and received the gospel. And that gospel was faithfully being preached. But over time, and probably through more and more persecution and resistance they started to grow complacent (like the city itself). If they did not wake up, Christ would come soon and take away their lampstand.

This is a huge warning to us as well. We must remember that God looks at our hearts. He doesn't want just energy; he wants devotion. He hates when we do things - even good things - out of a sense of tradition, duty or obligation.

Q: *How would you define complacency?*

Complacency is when we are self-satisfied and feel no need to continue or learn. The Christian is not called to be complacent, but to care for our hearts like we care for a garden. Gardens need to be tended constantly or else they will fall into disrepair.

Q: *What are signs of spiritual complacency in a church setting?*

Q: *What are signs of spiritual complacency in In a home or marriage or relationship setting?*

FOCUS ON ME

If you think about it, it's sort of amazing that God would bother to write a letter to a church that is virtually dead. I mean,.....Why bother? Jesus offers grace and provides a plan for their renewal- "Wake up! Strengthen...Remember....Obey....Repent"

He points them back to what they received – the Gospel that was preached and the Spirit that was sent. But there is an urgency to act! There is a limit to this. God wrote them a letter, but the time will run out. He will return...“like a thief” **(Revelation 3:3)**

Q: *What about you? What is the condition of your heart?*

Read Psalm 139:23-24

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.