



The Sardis church that was spiritually dead

9th February 2025



5th Sunday after Epiphany

Main Idea:

Jesus has warned us about tolerating sin. He's warned us about compromising with sin. Now, while writing to the church at Sardis we learn what happens when sin and corruption completely destroy a church fellowship.

Our relationship with Jesus needs to be constantly nurtured and fed. We need to be protecting it from allowing the weeds of sin, apathy and lethargy from growing. If we don't, we may discover we have become spiritually dead and need to heed the Spirit's urging for us to wake up!

This morning we continue with our readings from revelations, today we explore one of Jesus' seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor, this message is written to the church in Sardis.

So let's hear a little about this city.

Once upon a time, Sardis was the capital city of the Lydian Empire. This city was about thirty miles south of Thyatira, (we heard the story of Thyatira last Sunday), and about fifty miles east of Smyrna and was located close to the Pactolus river. Now the city of Sardis was built upon a peak, where three sides of the peak were vertically smooth rock walls. The city was about 1,500 feet above the valley floor, but as the city grew the hill area was limited, so the city expanded to the valley floor.

The people of the city felt secure because of the location and the natural defences of the city. They felt the three sides of the city were safe and impenetrable from attack due to the steep smooth rock walls and therefore this area was left unattended.

The people felt that only one side, the south side, needed to be guarded, and because of this false confidence, the people became overconfident. Their slackness led to the city being captured

once by Cyrus of Persia and later by the Romans. Both times the enemy troops scaled the steep smooth rock walls at night and took the city. In both cases the people had become lax in their defenses. The city had a reputation of being impenetrable, and yet it had been captured twice.

The carelessness and complacency of the people of Sardis allowed the city to become overconfident regarding their physical safety, and their enemies took advantage of their complacency, which led to the city's capture and downfall, twice. Sardis never regained its own dependence after being conquered. The city was destroyed by an earthquake around 17 A.D., and with the help of Emperor Tiberius, it was rebuilt.

In John's day the city was still prosperous but in decline, and it never regained its former glory. The city lost its physical appearance of greatness; the church of Sardis and the believers were following the same path. The memory of the days gone by were alive and well in the people, but the vitality and independent life of the city was gone. The church appeared to be alive outwardly to the naked eye, however inwardly, spiritually, it was dying.

As we examine the culture and context of this city, we note that the culture of complacency and over confidence had now flowed into the church community. Jesus goes straight to the point, and identifies the issue within the church, he says,

"I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God".

Jesus follows this statement by concern for the people and then a correction and at the end a confirmation of His care for them if they heed his words. He says to them,

"If you conquer, I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches".

So, our modern church communities can learn from these letters to the churches of Asia Minor all those years ago, and ensure that they are always on guard and therefore avoid complacency, carelessness and over confidence as the church communities continue on their journey with Jesus.

There are several things that we can do as individuals to keep our spiritual lives in good order, and I really don't need to delve too deeply as we all know the answers. Namely, develop a close, intimate, and personal relationship with Jesus as well as a communal relationship with Him, as we work and live daily with Jesus as a church community. Prayer is the most important element, listen to Jesus, he will speak to us through others, through the Scriptures, He will speak to us as we take time to be still and sit with Him, remember, trust and obey.

Keep your eyes upon Jesus and you will not be disappointed. I seem to remember hymns with these very words, so they must be important. We can always learn from the Scriptures, they give us guidance and direction as we often muddle through our sometimes messy lives. Always remember, Jesus knows every detail about us, He understands how very human we are, and still loves us and cares for us always.

Reading from Jesus Calling, February 3:

I am with you and for you. You face nothing alone--nothing! When you feel anxious, know that you are focusing on the visible world and leaving Me out of the picture. The remedy is

simple: Fix your eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. Verbalize your trust in Me, the Living One who sees you always. I will get you safely through this day and all your days. But you can find Me only in the present. Each day is a precious gift from My Father. How ridiculous to grasp for future gifts when today's is set before you! Receive today's gift gratefully, unwrapping it tenderly and delving into its depths. As you savor this gift, you find Me.

I visited a woman last week with home communion, I shall call her Victoria, she resides in a nursing home and is 89 years old. And this woman is still, praying, listening to Jesus and doing His work at the nursing home in which she lives.

She has an amazing relationship with Jesus, she certainly prays, listens for his voice, reads the scriptures, trusts and obeys his call, etc..... story about her daughter, visiting others at the home and so on. Derek's Mum.

So we are encouraged to be aware of Jesus' presence always, pray faithfully, trust and obey to ensure that we stay on track and avoid complacency, and overconfidence as we follow Jesus on this amazing journey.

Remember, trust and obey for there's no other way.... AMEN.

Closing prayer:

Heavenly Father, How challenging it is to hear your diagnosis on the church at Sardis: that though they had a reputation for being alive, they were *dead*. Show us the ways we have trusted too much in our reputation and neglected our own spiritual life. You told the congregation at Sardis to 'wake up!' Thank you for your patience. Bring us back to what we had 'received and heard' – take us back to the gospel. We want to 'hold fast' to your message of repentance and faith. We want to never stop turning from our sin and throwing ourselves on your mercy, living active lives of faith, hope and love. Help us to stir up the gift of life that has been given to us, and alert us to the ways in which our hearts have begun to die, rather than remaining invigorated by your Spirit. **Amen.**

Going deeper into what Jesus expects of his church ...



Look out for Week 6 of the "Journey through Christ's Letters to His Church" devotional:

This week we look closely at Jesus letter to the church at Sardis.

1. Is there any discrepancy between who you are on the inside and how you appear to others externally (Revelation 3:1)?
2. Does the fact that you will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ motivate you in your spiritual life?
3. Just as Christ knows all that goes on in the churches, so He knows all that goes on in each of our lives. Does that reality please you or scare you? Why