

Seven Churches Series
Study #5: A Spiritual Graveyard – Church of Sardis
Revelation 3:1 – 6
Bible Sermon Study Notes by Cary Rodgers, pastor

5th Church: Church of Sardis - “A Spiritual Graveyard”

Literal Historical and Modern-day Application

Sardis was about 35 miles south of Thyatira. It used to be the capital of Lydia before Greece and then Rome took it under their control. Sardis was a city of wealth due to its trade and commerce due to its location and abundant water source. Also Sardis was known for its beautiful landscape and rich farming soil. In AD 17 the city of Sardis experienced a devastating earthquake that nearly destroyed the entire city. They never fully recovered for decades after that earthquake.

Introduction

What was in the introduction of the letter to Sardis?

Revelation 3:1 (first part) - ¹And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; **These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.**

Seven Spirits of God

Remember seven is a number of completeness and promise. Seven is a sign or monument of God’s everlasting covenant and oath to the world. Jesus reveals to Sardis and us that He has these seven Spirits of God. **Isaiah 11:1 and 2 reveals in the “Pre-Gospel” these seven spirits that was upon Jesus Christ.**

Isaiah 11:1-2

1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:
 2 And the **spirit of the LORD** shall rest upon him, the **spirit of wisdom** and **understanding**, the spirit of **counsel** and **might**, the spirit of **knowledge** and of the **fear of the LORD**;

Seven Spirits of God

- 1) Lord = *self Existent* or eternal; *Jehovah (Jesus is Lord)*
- 2) *Wisdom*
- 3) *Understanding*
- 4) *Counsel*
- 5) *Might*
- 6) *Knowledge*
- 7) *Fear of the Lord (Reverence) The true and only “Reverent”*

Seven stars are the seven messengers/ministers/pastors of the seven churches that are in the right hand of Jesus.

Body of Message

What message did Jesus give to the church of Sardis in the last part of Revelation 3:1?

Revelation 3:1 ...I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Jesus places a spiritual magnifying glass on the church of Sardis exposing the true motivation behind their “church” works. In that magnifying glass Jesus sees that the church of Sardis has developed a name for itself or reputation. Upholding the name “Christian” was more than actually living as a Christian. In other words their

“works” was manufactured to get attention and recognition. The church of Sardis was performing the works of the church in order to maintain their status or reputation among the community. Sardis was all about self and its own image. Their name became more important than obedience to God's truth. **Their works just became tradition and matter of habit without understanding.**

Jesus revealed at the end of verse one that Sardis was not living, but dead. Jesus revealed their true spiritual condition out of love. **The church of Sardis was a “spiritual” graveyard.** Sardis deceived itself by thinking that they were spiritually alive because of their works, but Jesus’ message to them was that they were truly spiritually dead, not alive. Sardis was in a dangerous spiritual position. Jesus’ message was designed to expose their true dead condition and wake them up!

Does this apply to us today? Is our modern church a spiritual graveyard? We must stop just doing the work and take a close look at ourselves spiritually. Is the church growing spiritually? Is it being fed the nutritious truth of God’s word? Or is it being fed by the junk food of popular opinion and men’s theories and ideas? Never forget only the Bible reveals the full truth of God and only the full truth of God’s Word in your heart will grow you spiritually, not just feel good sermons or speeches.

How did Sardis become spiritually dead and how can we become spiritually dead? (Four major reasons)

John 15:4-6

- 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
- 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
- 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Reason 1- Sardis was severed from the VINE by the “Husbandman.” They talked the talked but did not bear the fruit of Christ because they were no longer abiding in Christ. If you don’t abide IN Christ daily you will become spiritual dead. Jesus is the VINE not a church conference or pastor. Your salvation can ONLY come through the connection to the VINE!

How do professed Christian become cut from the VINE? Here is a second reason why they become spiritually dead?

Romans 8:6

6 For to be **carnally minded is death**; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Note: Carnal and Flesh are the same: Sarx in Greek – sinful nature

Romans 7:5

5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

Reason 2– Selfishness and– Self-centeredness severed Sardis relationship from Jesus. Sardis became a self-servicing church. Sardis became more concerned about things that would please the flesh instead of the spiritual things. Worldly entertainment had more attraction. They were more concerned about what others would say or do instead sticking to “thus saith the Lord.” They were more concerned about their name than the truth. They enjoyed the praise of others for their great works of the past. Prominent leaders and ministers accepted the praise of men. Buildings were probably named after the “great” evangelist or preacher. Statues and monuments were probably built in their honor. Paintings of these men may have been plastered on the wall. They looked to self and their accomplishment. Members of Sardis probably built beautiful homes. The

church of Sardis probably began a church building with a “family life” center named after their biggest donor. The activities of the youth centered on entertainment instead of true gospel work. They got comfortable with coming to church to service self.

This is a perfection reflection of our modern-day churches. We are more concerned about letters behind someone name more than the Word of God. John Doe, DMin, Phd, DD, JD etc. We have become self-centered and self-serving. Look at our beautiful buildings.... etc...

Is our faith like Sardis' faith more dependent on “feeling” instead of Bible truth. Why is this dangerous? **Jeremiah 17:9** says The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

What is the third major reason why Sardis became spiritually dead?

Luke 22:40, 45, 46

40 And when he [Jesus] was at the place, he said unto them, **Pray that ye enter not into temptation.**

45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,

46 And said unto them, **Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.**

Mark 14:37, 38

37 And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, **Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one hour?**

38 **Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly *is* ready, but the flesh *is* weak.**

Ephesians 6:11-18

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

1 Thessalonians 5:17

17 Pray without ceasing. (Constant attitude of prayer. Always aware that you are in the presence of a Holy God)

Reason 3 - “Pray” in the Greek: proseuchomai (pros-yoo'-khom-ah-ee) to pray to God, that is, supplicate, worship. Supplicate means to make requests. Prayer is a form of worship. It is our life spiritual connection with God. Prayer gives us an awareness of the presence of God. Prayer brings us up to God. Sardis neglected to pray collectively and individually. The neglect of prayer to God will result in spiritual death. Have you neglected prayer? Spiritual death is certain.

What is the fourth major reason why Sardis and modern churches are spiritually dead?

John 6:35, 47, 48 58

35 **And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.**

47 **Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.**

48 **I am that bread of life.**

58 **This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.**

Matthew 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Remember there is NOTHING that replaces personal Bible study and investigating the scriptures. Listening to Bible truth from the pulpit is great, thought provoking, and encouraging. You must taste and see that the Lord is good for yourself. You must have your own experience. The preacher can only describe the bread of God's word, the benefits, how it tastes, and what it will do in your life. You have to personally partake yourself to know what that bread tastes like!

Reason 4 – God's Word is LIFE. Without it we are dead! Sardis individually and as a church stopped studying God's Word on a daily basis. They stop eating the bread / flesh of Jesus daily like food. If you fail to eat eventually you will die. The same is true spiritually if you fail to eat God's word daily you will die spiritually. There is life in the Word. The messages at the church of Sardis was not longer rooted in God's words, but the words of men.

In summary, Jesus reveals that Sardis was dead spiritually, God cut them off from the Vine and because they submitted to their fleshly sinful desires instead of Christ. This all happened because they failed to be constant in prayer and daily Bible study. Does this apply to our modern day churches? Does it apply to you?

What instructions does Jesus give to the church of Sardis and us today?

Revelation 3:2-3

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

The first set of instructions that Jesus gives to the church of Sardis is “be watchful”.

Watchful (Greek meaning) grēgoreuō (*gray-gor-yoo'-o*): **keep awake**, that is, *watch* (literally or figuratively): - be **vigilant**, wake, (be) watch (-ful).

Why did Jesus tell Sardis and us to be watchful meaning stay awake or be vigilant?

What does Jesus say at the end of **Revelation 3:2**? **If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.**

Matthew 25:13 Jesus says, ¹³Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (Does this apply to us today?)

Sardis developed a habit of neglect instead of a habit of watching. Are we doing the same? What are we watching? Are we watching God's Word and being obedient to God's Word? Or are we watching All My Children, One Life To Live, General Hospital, Scandel, Judge Judy, NFL, NBA.... Etc... Are we watching the next hip hop BET video, MTV? Comedy Network, Oprah Network...Etc.. What are you watching for, Jesus? Watch and pray always!

Luke 21:36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

The second set of instructions that Jesus gives to the church of Sardis is “strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.” And then he said in first part of verse 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

Sardis allowed the vital truths of God's WORD to quickly fade away and were being replaced with more pleasing words that pleased the “flesh”.

What are the vital truths that modern churches have allowed to fade away?

Victory over sin, The 10 Commandment including the seventh day Sabbath, The State of the Dead, The Sanctuary Message, Health Reform, Dress Reform, Righteousness by Faith, Three Angels Message of Revelation 14, Prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, Marriage between a man and a woman. The modern churches are allowing these and many other vital Bible truths slip out the door! The modern church is teaching cheap Nicolaitan and Laodicean grace in which the church can continue to mix worldly corruption with the Holy things of God and still make it to Heaven. This is an abomination and a LIE. They are “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” or filthiness according to Jude 1:4.

Jesus told the church of Sardis (Revelation 3:3) and tells us today to strengthen the things that remain and go back to the truths that were heard and accepted at the church's beginning and hold on to those truths.

We must go back to old paths which are the old truths that are still true and relevant for our day.

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*.

“I have not found thy works perfect before God.”

At the end of verse 2 Jesus says “**I have not found thy works perfect before God.**” Before the message came to Sardis they were confident that they were a living testimony of the works of God. Jesus revealed that the works they thought were perfect were not perfect before God. This is a result of them losing that vital connection with Jesus through prayer and study. Sardis began to look at what others were doing instead of going to the Bible for instruction. Are we doing the same today? Because another church does praise dance, does it make it right? Because another church has a puppet ministry, does it make it right? Because another church rocks and rolls, mime, hip hop, and gyrate, does it make it right? Is Jesus saying to us today “I have not found thy works perfect before God”?

But what remedy did God give to Sardis and us today? Let's look at it again.

Revelation 3:3 **Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.**

REPENT. Greek meaning “To think differently” Repentance is an attitude of humility purposing with ALL your heart to turn from sin through the power of Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Repentance transformed a renewed thinking. This will bring about a renewed perfect doing of God's will.

Near the conclusion of the message to Sardis, which special group within Sardis did Jesus recognize?

Revelation 3:4 **Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.**

“Few” in the Greek is oligos (*ol-ee'-gos*) which means “puny”. So this text implies that only a very small number of people in Sardis were still spiritually alive while the majority were spiritually dead. During the time

of Sardis and NOW Jesus has a people that may be few in number that will NOT be corrupted by the world. They will put on the righteousness of Jesus and hold on to the Bible truths and stay faithful to Him.

Jesus saw this special group as worthy to live with Him eternally because they kept their focus on Jesus Christ and was purified with His blood.

Is this the type of group you want to be a part of? A group, even though they may be small in number, but are truly faithful to the Word of God. Is it safe to base your spiritual beliefs on what the majority of the church says or what the Bible says? If you are basing your belief on the majority, the Bible reveals that you are listening to those who are spiritually dead.

The majority or popular opinion can lead you down the wrong road. NEVER base your spiritual beliefs on what the majority says only by what the Bible says.

Matthew 7:13-14 ¹³Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

What did Jesus say at the conclusion of His message to the church of Sardis?

Revelation 3:5-6

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

What prophetic historical church period does Sardis represent?

The church of Sardis represents church history from 1798 to 1844 known as the Great Awakening and Second Advent Message

During the time of the Papal Empire, the church went through a very dark time in which many were denied the truth of God's Word. It was during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries in which true men and women of God protested against the false and unbiblical teachings of the Papal Roman Empire. Brave men of God such as Martin Luther, John Huss, John Calvin and John and Charles Wesley were reformers who used the Word of God to fight or protest against the false doctrines of the state/ universal church system of Rome.

But in 1798 the Protestant movement claimed victory when the Papal Empire came to an end in 1798. At the beginning of the 1800's the protestant church was excited to be no longer under the persecuting power of Papal Rome.

During this time:

Evangelistic campaigns added one million to the church

Schools were set up to train ministers

Missions were established in foreign countries

The British and Foreign Bible Society was organized

The American Bible Society was organized

Church Bible schools were established such as Sunday school. The church was at study!

Anti-slavery campaigns movement gaining ground

From 1833 to 1844 was known as the great advent message of the second coming of Jesus was preached by hundreds of ministers worldwide. In America the most notable was William Miller, a Baptist preacher whose

Bible teachings of the second advent of Jesus Christ laid the foundation for the Seventh day Adventist Movement.

Is it time to wake up to the truth?

Romans 13:11-

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

The best way to wake up is to get up and reconnect with Jesus, by turning from the world, denying our fleshly desires. We must pray and study God's word daily in order to stay awake.

Daily prayer and study is vital. Remember the neglect of prayer and study was a reason why Sardis died spiritually and it is the reason why the modern church is also a spiritual graveyard.

“Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind.” GC 519

“Temptations often appear irresistible because, through neglect of prayer and the study of the Bible, the tempted one cannot readily remember God's promises and meet Satan with the Scripture weapons. But angels are round about those who are willing to be taught in divine things; and in the time of great necessity, they will bring to their remembrance the very truths which are needed. Thus “when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” [Isaiah 59:19.] {GC88 599.3}

Appeal