

Seven pt5

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Seven / Revelation 3:1–6

Why does a church exist? We have discussed this before. There are a lot of reasons a church hangs around as an organization after it ceases to be a church. And some of us see these former church buildings now used for different purposes and lament...what could have been...and what is sad is that so often the church itself never saw it coming.

I don't want to be one of those pastors at one of those churches.

That is one reason why I felt the Lord calling us to these passages in this series. We are not done yet, but if we are not careful we could be. And today's church is the starkest, most direct warning yet.

This warning should cause all of us to examine ourselves, because in our day and time, when comparison is the easiest way to make ourselves feel better in spite of the reality staring us in the mirror, overconfidence leads to destruction. Which makes the history of Sardis a case study in how history provides us ample warning...Sardis was a city that was viewed as an impregnable fortress...yet it had fallen 2x to enemy armies due to the overconfidence of its defenders.

Remember how I said last week, all these letters start with a compliment for the church being addressed? Well watch as we read thru this week's and tell me what you see.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

Smalley takes special note of the lack of any commendation for Sardis, thus abandoning the pattern of message to the first four congregations. Whatever the exact meaning and the cause of this omission may have been, the consequences are, in this case, what really matters. **The**

church is not brokering life but death, and its prospects for the future are as dim as those of the citadel's overconfident defenders in the sordid history of Sardis.

Read [Revelation 3:1-6](#).

So the intro of this passage Jesus is short and direct. He says He has or holds the seven spirits...this is a reference to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at each church

And He has the seven stars- this is the seven churches He has been in the process of addressing. And one thing to notice here- He "has" them or "holds" them. They are His.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

The purpose of the identification seems to be relational. The risen Christ maintains relationship with both the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit; see 1:4) and with the seven stars identified as the angels of the seven churches. Once again the deeds of the church at Sardis are clearly known to the One who has both the Spirit and the seven stars

I think that is one thing we can forget about a church if we are not careful. It does not belong to us. We do not own it or have a say in it. We serve in a church. We are a part of a church. **But we do not have stock in it like a business or have a co-ownership.** The church belongs to Jesus. He is the boss. (story about painting a youth room)

And in this letter, the Owner wastes no time making His thoughts known.

“I know your works”- Jesus knows what they are doing...and they may even be proud of it...whatever they are doing is being noticed by other churches, maybe even by the community

Because Jesus says “You have the reputation of being alive”- so they are seen as a model, as healthy, as being what a church should aspire to be

But Jesus’ Spirit knows the truth and He says “but you are dead.”

Dang. What an indictment. Basically, you are a bunch of frauds, fakes, phonies. In short, you are not a living body. You are a corpse.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

In Sardis **the question is the relationship between reputation and reality**. The reputation of the church at Sardis was life, but the reality was that they were dead

What are they doing wrong? Well we know this, they are putting on a good show so there is nothing outward that is blatant- none of the “big” sins we always concentrate on. This is far worse.

Look at vs 2-3.

Their “works” are not complete- they are not doing ministry to see people come to know Jesus. It is for show...or prestige...or acceptance..or some other reason

And, they have forgotten why they became a church in the first place. This church has lost the Gospel. They have lost Jesus.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

The Lord’s judgment is that he has not found the deeds of the church at Sardis to be complete in the sight of God. “Complete” is a translation of the perfect passive participle of plēroō and is one possible rendering. But here the NIV is not as helpful. The word often carries the idea of being “full” or “filled.” The offense is that Sardis has not filled the

standard expected by the risen Lord.

Further counsel urges the saints of Sardis to remember two things—that which they received and that which they heard—and to be obedient to that heavenly vision through repentance. That which had been received would have to reflect the word of God, salvation, and all the manifestations of the grace of God. That which they had heard probably represents the message of redemption

We could easily do that. In our day and time, churches lose the Gospel to all kinds of things:

Social issues

Politics

Racial identity

Tradition

Religion

A longing for the old days

The list is LONG...and the slide is sneaky...because it often starts with the BEST of intentions, maybe even one based on the Gospel.

And that is not to say that some of these things are not COMPONENTS of what comes out of a church that is focused on the Gospel, but they are not THE GOSPEL. And when we lose sight of wanting to see people come to know Jesus as their Savior as the main reason why we are here, we aren't a church any longer. **We are something else...and Jesus isn't asking us to be something else...He has called us to be a CHURCH...HIS CHURCH!**

At the end of verse 3, Jesus tells the church to “wake up.” And that is what falling away is like for a church...like drifting off to sleep. And Jesus sounds a foghorn to call them back to being awake.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

The mandate for Sardis is “**wake up,**” a present active Greek participle with the sense of “awake” or “watchful.” This is preceded by a present middle imperative of ginomai, which means “become.” The church, then, is told to “wake up” or “be watchful” and strengthen whatever remains that is also close to death

And He has a good reason, because His judgment is coming for this church. And quickly and harshly.

He says He is coming like a thief- unexpectedly- and that He is coming against them. What chance does a church that is not really a church have against God? None.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

Allusion to the fate of the city of Sardis in days long past is obvious here. **Just as the overconfident city, unaware of the enemy scaling its walls, fell when least expected; so, too, the church at Sardis, with its reputation for life, stood at that moment imperiled by a thief-like visit from God, which would result in its destruction.** The threat suggests that dead and dying churches are frequently oblivious to either their condition or to the imminent threat.

What hope is there for this church? Look at verse 4-5.

They too have a remnant. There are people here who have stayed true to the Gospel. They have not lost the plot and followed other things that took them away from the Gospel. They still know the purpose of the Church.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

Churches with reputations for life but who, nonetheless, harbor primarily death are common enough in any age. One feature of many of these is the presence within the church of saints who have not succumbed to the death that is all around them. Sardis was no exception. Singled out in Sardis is a group that is said not to have “soiled their clothes.”

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

Those, however, who had participated in separated and holy living were promised that they would be ambulatory with the Lord himself. This walk would continue in holiness since they would be dressed in white. This promise has special significance for these who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

And He has a name for them “worthy.”

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

The reason for this walk in white with Christ is because these are worthy (axios). However, **this achievement is not the accomplishment of the overcomer but is a bestowed or imputed worth based on the sacrifice of the worthy Lamb.** Revelation 12:11 declares, “They overcame him / by the blood of the Lamb.

That means they are valuable. They are people who are still contributing to the Kingdom and no matter what happens to the church at Sardis, they are going to be ok. He has them. They are His.

Revelation 5. To Sardis (3:1–6)

A final portion of the promise to the conquerors is that Christ will confess their names in the presence of his Father and before his angels. Clothed in the white of holiness, the overcomer walks as worthy into the presence of God and the angels, unafraid of his name having been removed from the Book of Life; and he listens as Jesus confesses his name before all the cosmos. The usual formula concludes the message: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Whose are you? What are you counting on for your soul? What is the purpose of your works?

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