

**Introduction:**

**Revivals are never born out of indifference, complacency, lethargy, and superficial forms of religion.**

**Revivals are born out of repentance, brokenness, spiritual poverty, and a passionate longing for God.**

As long as we remain content with the status quo, we will never see God move powerfully among us.

But if we allow ourselves to hunger and thirst desperately for righteousness, then He promises us that we will be filled.

According to Jesus, the church in Sardis was a dead church. This news probably came to them as a shock. Somehow, they had somehow acquired a good reputation. Maybe that reputation was justified at one time, but no longer. From this letter it's not entirely clear what happened.

Perhaps it began with a little compromise with the world and over time they just got comfortable with that compromised state. There was no longer a sense of urgency to reach the lost. Their hearts were no longer broken over their sin. Christ's return was no longer on their radar screen. Finally, they became content with all that and had slowly fallen asleep. Compromise turned into corruption and now the church was dead.

Ministries frequently pass through four stages: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument. Sardis was now almost completely through the "machine" stage. A "monument" was already being built. A fossil was being formed. Nevertheless, Christ still holds out hope.

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**A Look at the Passage:**

**3:1** **Sardis** was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. The original city was built on place over 1500 ft. high with sheer cliffs on all side but one. This made the city easily defensible and the people of Sardis felt safe from potential enemies. In over 1000 years of history the city had only been conquered twice. Both times the enemy could have been fought off. Defeat was due to a lack of watchfulness on the part of those who were supposed to be defending the city.

Jesus is speaking to the church, not the city, but there is an important lesson to be learned from their history. There was a danger in overconfidence.

Sardis may have invented the concept of nominal Christianity. They were a living church in name alone. They had reputation without reality. This was a church full of hypocrites – which means actors. These people were acting a part. They were playing at church; the life Christ was looking for was missing.

Sardis had a large and influential Jewish community. A synagogue built after this writing was about the length of a football field and right next to the city gymnasium – where pagan Greek culture would have thrived. In Smyrna and Philadelphia Christians and Jews had an adversarial relationship. Here in Sardis there is no mention of conflict at all. Probably the church blended peacefully with this important Jewish community and could therefore do the same with the whole surrounding city. Without saying that opposition is always good, the fact is this church didn't have any and was allowed to grow comfortable.

Alexander MacLaren describes it,

*“Sardis had not life enough to be obnoxious. Why should the world trouble itself about a dead church? It exactly answers the world's purpose, and is really only a bit of the world under another name.”*

**Seven Spirits** See **Revelation 1:4, 4:5 & 5:6**. You can go back to **Zechariah 4** for its origin.

Why is the Holy Spirit going to be important for this church?

**John 6:63** *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

**Seven Stars** These are the seven angels or “messengers” to the churches. The messenger was to some extent responsible for the church. This church a wakeup call and he was to give it.

**Alive ... dead** contrast Jesus in **1:18** and **2:8**

**3:2** Jesus reminds them that they need to be more watchful. This is what He repeatedly told His disciples during His earthly ministry – especially in conjunction with His return.

**Matthew 24:42** *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.*

**Matthew 25:13** *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

**Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.** So the church wasn't totally dead. Some parts were only “ready to die.” Jesus knows that there are some that still have enough life in them to listen – who can try to make a difference right where they are.

Some people stay in dead churches because they are lethargic and don't want to make waves. That may be the case with these believers in Sardis. Still, Jesus is giving them a ministry if they will take it. They can be watchful and look for opportunities to serve or to impact lives right where they are – within an otherwise dead church. In a church that has declined into nominal Christianity, in a church without life, there may still be a few people with a living faith.

**I have not found your works perfect** This word perfect is somewhat misleading, because it sounds like Christ wants their works to be utterly flawless. It really means more like “a full measure” of something.

The ESV translates it as “complete,” which is more accurate.

The NLT says, *“I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God.”*

Their works were insufficient. They weren’t doing enough. Their reality did not live up to their reputation – not by a long way.

**3:3 If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief** We mentioned that in the long history of Sardis, it was overthrown only twice. Both times, the reason was that those responsible for defending the city failed to watch. They became overconfident. They didn’t think it could happen to them and they were wrong.

They are not being watchful. They need to live with a sense of urgency. How many of us go about our days as if our lives won’t ever count for anything in eternity? We live as if it was a matter of zero consequence whether Jesus came back today or never came back at all. We live as if Christ may have risen from the dead and equally well may not have. We’ve been lulled into a deep, deep sleep.

**Illustration from the OT:** Think back on the example of **Gideon** from the book of **Judges**. He started out well and the Lord won a great battle through him with an army of only a few to defend his people. But later, he failed to remain watchful. That zeal didn’t continue.

He made a golden ephod to commemorate his victory. Then when the people began using it as an object for their idolatry, he failed to stop them (Judg. 8:27). He lowered the standards.

This prepared the way for the people to return to Baal worship after his death. His spiritual legacy might have been powerful, but in the end it was mixed. He destabilized the spiritual foundation he had built earlier in his life (8:33). Gideon may have been looking back to his past victory – his past reputation – but he should have been making plans for the future.

**Illustration from recent history:** Closer to our own day, there is the example of the churches in Nazi Germany. When the state began passing racist laws, some of the pastors protested. Others didn’t. Dietrich Bonhoeffer fought this compromise, but he and those like him became increasingly isolated. He argued “that the failure of German Christians to resist the Nazi rise to power stemmed from their lack of moral clarity.”

A “lack of moral clarity” describes more and more churches today. Things are increasingly difficult and it’s easy to give in. Our pulpits are singing lullabies rather than sounding an alarm.

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**3:4** Charles Spurgeon, preaching a sermon based on this verse, made a distinction between the *professors* and the *possessors*. Sardis had many *professors* – those who professed to be Christians. They were Christians in name alone. This verse speaks of the *possessors*. Their faith was real, their lives were pure and the reward for their labors was certain. He commented:

*Be encouraged; there are a few in Sardis. But be careful, for perhaps you are not one of the few. Since there are but a few, there ought to be great searchings of heart. Let us look to our garments and see whether they be defiled. If they be not, we shall walk in white, for we are worthy through Jesus. Be active; be prayerful. The fewer the workmen to do the work the greater reason is there that you should be active. Be instant in season and out of season, because there are so few.*

**3:5 Book of Life** There are seven references to the Book of Life in Revelation.

They are: **Rev 3:5 13:8 17:8 20:12 20:15 21:27 22:19**

**Exodus 32:32-33** <sup>32</sup>Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.” <sup>33</sup>And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

**Psalms 69:28** Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.

**Daniel 12:1-2** <sup>1</sup> “At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. <sup>2</sup> And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

See **Revelation 20:11-15**.

Possible understanding:

- Book of Life contains all those ever born
- Those who reject Christ have their names blotted out (at death?) They will be judged according to their works alone.
- True Believers written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (13:8, 21:27)
- Here is the choice: Our sins must be blotted out or our name will be blotted out.

**I will confess his name** Jesus said this in the Gospel of Luke.

**Luke 12:8-9** <sup>8</sup>Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. <sup>9</sup>But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

**3:6** This last verse is again a call to attention, a call to action and a call to obedience.

## Conclusions:

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- **Beware of a nominal Christianity.** The world loves merely professing Christians because their lives are in complete harmony with the world. The solution is to examine ourselves.

*2 Corinthians 13:5-6* <sup>5</sup>Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. <sup>6</sup>But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

The church in Sardis was not busy doing this. They were trusting in a reputation that no longer matched their present reality. Consistent self-examination, consistent correction and a realigning with God's will would have kept them from getting into this place.

- **Stay watchful.** The church of Sardis died in its sleep – or perhaps froze to death. They were no longer watching, no longer examining themselves, no longer waiting for the return of Jesus,
- **Don't despair if your works are not flawless; rather determine to never give up.** We may find that as we examine ourselves there is much to be desired as to our life in Christ. We can't let this lead us to despair or discouragement. When someone asks, "Are you sleeping?" and you answer, "Yes!" you are probably not sleeping very soundly. Christ would say to you, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die!" There is still hope and there is still obvious potential for revival.
- The very word revival, if we take the definition from Merriam-Webster, is the perfect remedy for a church that has become dead like the one in Sardis.
  - 1: to restore to consciousness or life      See **v. 1**
  - 2: to restore from a depressed, inactive, or unused state : bring back      See **v.2**
  - 3: to renew in the mind or memory      See **v.3**
- **Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.** This corrective is intended for us.
  - Some of us might be living with a dead faith already. We need to wake up.
  - Some of us are beginning to fall asleep. Don't let it happen.
  - Some of us have a mental grasp of the doctrines of Christianity, but our works are insufficient or incomplete. That is what dead faith looks like. We need to get busy.
  - Some of us have never actually possessed a living faith to begin with. We need to receive that eternal life that only Christ can give.

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