



5 – SARDIS: “The Spiritually Dead Church” ... (Revelation 3:1-6)

As we begin to look at this our fifth “message to the church” ... Notice, as Christ described Himself **as the one who “has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”**. The **“sevenfold Spirit of God”** is another name for **the Holy Spirit in His ministry fullness** (cp. Isaiah 11:2-5, Revelation 5:6). The “seven stars” are the messengers, or leaders, of the churches.

Unfortunately, knowing this church's deeds ... **Jesus had no good words to say to them**. **These believers may have thought they were a living and active church ... but according to Christ they were dead!**

The church at Sardis was described as being **“dead”** (3:1). That is, it appeared to be alive – it had **“a reputation of being alive”** – it looked spiritually vibrant on the outside – but was spiritually lifeless. The church was Christian in name only. This recalls Christ's scathing rebuke of the Pharisees who ... **“look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean”** (Matthew 23:27).

This church may have had a good reputation, but they were spiritually lifeless. In other words, the church was filled with **unsaved people** going through the motions of religion. Obviously, there were many tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).

Today many church members are known as “Christians.” They want to be known as caring for the poor, or supporting evangelism and missions ... but are nowhere to be found when the actual work must be done! They vote for all the proper initiatives, but disappear when service or money are required. To merely keep up the appearance of Christian dedication without any intent to serve or support ... amounts to hypocrisy! **Make sure your own deeds back up your words!** (Matthew 23:23-28; James 1:22-25)

We should also notice ... that there are no words of commendation to the believers at Sardis. Nor did the Lord point out any doctrinal problems that required correction. Neither is there any mention of opposition or persecution. **The church would have been better off had there been some suffering, for it had grown comfortable and content and was living on its past reputation!**

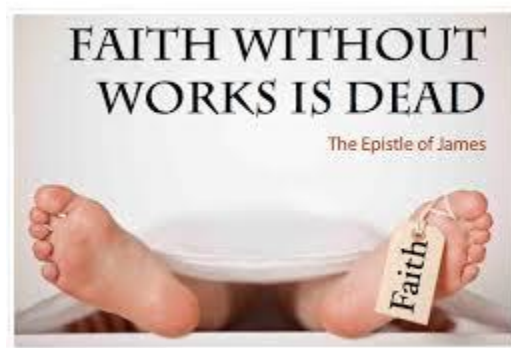
There was reputation without reality, form without force! Like the city itself, the church at Sardis ... gloried in past splendor, but ignored present decay!

In fact, even what they did have was about to die! Why? **Because the believers had gone to sleep.** Twice in its long history ... the citadel at Sardis had been captured. Each time: Because the sentries (guards) had failed to do their jobs faithfully!

Likewise, it is when church leaders and members get accustomed to their blessings and complacent about their ministry ... that the enemy finds his way in!

Here, the impression is that the assembly in Sardis was not aggressive in its witness to the city. **There was no persecution ... because there was no invasion of the enemy's territory. "No friction usually means no motion!"**

- The unsaved people in Sardis saw the church as a respectable group of people ***who were neither dangerous nor desirable.*** They were decent people with a dying witness and a decaying ministry!



Sardis needed to "wake up" (3:2). Their wealth and comfort had lulled them to sleep. Their self-satisfaction caused them to die spiritually. Not only had they wandered from the apostles' teachings, ***but they were no longer growing in faith or evangelism.*** They lacked compassionate service to others and had no unity or love.

Key Points: the dangers of complacency, the importance of repentance, and the need to strengthen what remains ... by remembering and holding fast to the original teachings of Christ.

- **Vigilance:** Jesus warns that if they do not wake up, He will come ***"like a thief."***

The lesson to Sardis is ***"to finish what you started"*** ... and to be prepared and live each day as if you are anticipating His return!

However, ***not every believer in Sardis ... was being condemned for complacency and compromise with the world.*** Christ pointed out ... that there were some ***who had not soiled their garments with evil deeds.*** These believers were being faithful!

It must have been very encouraging to those few who had been attempting to live for Christ in this dead church ... that Christ was commending them as worthy of His name.

Christ promises a **threefold reward** for these faithful few:

1. ***They will be clothed in white.***
2. ***I will never erase their names from the Book of Life.***
3. ***I will announce before my Father and His angels that they are Mine!***