

**TITLE: #5: SARDIS**  
**SERIES: 7 Lessons from 7 Churches ( 5 of 7)**  
**Text: Revelation 3:1-6**

Balboa Community Church  
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## INTRO

Our series is: 7 Lessons from 7 Churches. We are looking at the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation Chapters 2 & 3. These were 7 actual churches located in Asia Minor during the First Century.

Christ wrote letters to each of these 7 churches.

Today we look at the fifth church: SARDIS. Sardis was a wealthy city that was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia - one of the most important cities in the Persian Empire.

Let's listen to Joe Stowell, president of Cornerstone University, who is on location at the ancient ruins of this once great city.

[VIDEO - Sardis]

Let's look now at the letter of Jesus to the church in Sardis. It's found in Revelation 3:1-6.

## GREETING

**Revelation 3:1a** - Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars. NLT

The city of Sardis was located about 30 miles south of Thyatira - the city we looked at last week.

Sardis had been one of the most powerful cities in the ancient world due to heavy trade among the Aegean islands. It is said that gold and silver coins were first minted at Sardis. The city also claimed to have discovered the art of dyeing wool. It's beautiful textiles were sought worldwide.

It was a wealthy city... and proud of it. But over time its wealth led to moral decadence, and the city began to decline. They got lazy.

By the time of the Roman Empire, Sardis had lost its great reputation. They had requested the honor of building a temple to Caesar, but were refused, and the honor went to Smyrna instead.

Sardis still thought it was a great city. They couldn't see the decline. They were living on their past reputation.

So Christ writes this letter to the church at Sardis, and He says it is from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God. Bible scholars believe it refers to the Holy Spirit. And the 7 stars refers to 7 messengers or perhaps the 7 pastors of these 7 churches.

## COMPLAINT

**Revelation 3:1b** - I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead..  
NLT

Christ gets right to the heart of the issue: "You are dead."

The other churches we look at in Revelation 2 struggled with

persecution. Some had the temptation to compromise their faith. Other churches had to deal with heresy - false teachings that threatened to destroy them.

But the church at Sardis was spiritually dead.

They looked alive on the outside - they had a great reputation as a church of being alive - but they were dead on the inside.

Sardis was infested with sin. Their clothes were dirty or contaminated with sin.

It was a church that looked good on the outside, but was actually on life support.

## REMEDY

**Revelation 3:2-3** - <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God.

<sup>3</sup> Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.  
NLT

Christ provides a 5 step remedy to bring this dead church back to life again.

**1. Wake up!** Any process of recovery must begin with the realization of the situation. You must first admit that you are dead. Stop fooling yourselves into thinking you're this great church.

**2. Strengthen what remains.** There were some in the church at Sardis who weren't completely dead yet.

**Revelation 3:4** - Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. NLT

Those leaders who are responsible for the dead church should step aside. Those who are still walking with Jesus should be leading. They should be confronting sin and teaching God's commands. It's important to strengthen those things that are of God.

## 3. Go back

**v. 3** - Go back to what you heard and believed at first. NLT

Remember how you made the decision to become a follower of Jesus - the commitment, the decisiveness, the courage, the determination.

Remember what you were first taught - what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The difference between the world and Christ. Darkness & light. What it means to be holy.

**4. Hold firmly.** In other words, obey what you were taught from God's Word. It's not enough to just believe it. You must live it - every day that you live.

**5. Repent.** Turn back to God. You were going that way... away from God. Now turn around and go this way... toward God.

## PROMISE

**Revelation 3:5** - All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. NLT

To be clothed in white means to be set apart for God, cleansed from sin, made morally and spiritually pure.

Those Christians in Sardis who repent will be victorious. And Christ promises that they will live eternally with Him and be His forever.

Christ ends this letter to the church at Sardis with the same words for each church.

**Revelation 3:6** - Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. NLT

## LIFE LESSONS

Sardis needed to wake up. 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 one another... and had no unity or love.

The same things that occurred in the church at Sardis can happen to churches today. Experts say churches often go through...

## FOUR STAGES OF LIFE

- 1. The MOVEMENT stage.** This is the beginning stage of most churches. They start small with a group who are very driven believers...focused on reaching their community. Everyone in the group is committed to the church and its mission. Everyone goes to all the meetings. The members are very close as they spend time together in Bible study & fellowship.
- 2. The MAGNIFICENCE stage.** This is when the church reaches its highest level of attendance—and because of their size, they can do things they could only dream about before. However, the commitment level of the group begins to dip. They still have the vision and dream—but the intensity has definitely diminished.
- 3. The MONUMENT stage.** In this stage, the church members begin to talk less about the future than they do about their past. They work at maintaining their past reputation. They do things primarily because that's the way they've always done them.
- 4. Finally comes the MAUSOLEUM stage...or "the dead church stage."** Most of the founding members have either drifted away or died. Attendance levels are between

10% and 50% on any Sunday. Many people come when they don't have anything else to do. No lives are being changed.

Calvin Coolidge, our 30<sup>th</sup> president, was an extremely quiet and reserved man. He earned him the nickname, "Silent Cal." The public saw him as a stiff and emotionless man. Someone once said, that he looked like he was weaned on a pickle. Well, in 1933 the radio airwaves crackled with the news of Coolidge's death. Columnist Dorothy Parker was in her office at The New Yorker magazine when a colleague flung open the door and blurted, "Dottie, did you hear? Coolidge is dead." She shot back, "How can they tell?"

Sometimes it's hard to tell if a church is dead. On the outside, they may look like a very successful church. Lots of people. Programs for every interest group. Activities every day of the week. Visiting speakers and musicians. The place seems alive.

But God says He knows all the things they do, and their reputation for being alive... and He pronounces them "DEAD." Spiritually dead.

It can happen to any church. It can happen to Balboa. Churches will often focus on activities to keep up the appearance that they are an "alive" church, when in reality they are dead.

The same can be said for individual Christians. There are many dead Christians who are walking around as if they are still alive. They attend church, even read their Bibles. But their passion for following Jesus has died. Their commitment has diminished. They are the "walking dead."

The instructions that Christ gave to the church in Sardis apply to every church... and every believer.

- 1. Wake Up.** You can fool other people, but you can't fool God. Many Christians think all they have to do is what other Christians do - look, act and talk like a Christian... and you are one. But God knows that you're dead & need to wake up.
- 2. Strengthen what remains.** As a church, let's let the godly men and women lead. Let's reinforce the good and valuable things we have learned from God.
- 3. Go back.** Back to the basics of life with Christ. We can't substitute programs for a real relationship with Jesus. It starts with Him.
- 4. Hold firmly.** There are a lot of distractions in the world... false teachings. We have to hold firm to what God has instructed and obey Him completely.
- 5. Repent.** If your Christian life is on life support, you need to repent. That is, turn completely from the way you have been going... and totally move toward God.

Remember, God is always more concerned about your heart, than He is about your activities. The heart determines your activities... and your love for Him.