

09. Sardis: Church of the living dead

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Letters from Jesus

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Bible Text: Revelation 3:1-6

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May I ask you to take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 3. This is continuing a series in the letters to the seven churches from Jesus and after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos and dictated seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor and said, "You need to deliver these messages to the messengers of the churches there." This is the fifth letter we've studied so far in our study and this is going to be the letter to the church at Sardis. It's kind of a gruesome title really but for obvious reasons, it's really the "Church of the Living Dead" and we can still see ruins of Sardis to this day and we know a whole lot about it because of its archeology that has gone on there.

I'm going to ask you just in honor of God's word, if you'd stand as we read Revelation 3:1-7 together.

"1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 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. 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. 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.

Let's pray.

Father, we do pray that we have an attentive ear today and that your Spirit would speak to our hearts and show us the spiritual dangers that brought about the destruction of Sardis and unless we repent, could bring about our own undoing as well. Father, we thank you that you are here now, minister to our hearts and bring us into a right relationship with you for it is in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you. You may be seated.

I want to talk about Sardis the city, several aspects of that. It was a city of war. It was a city of work. It was a city of wealth and of worship. It was a city of wellness, a city of waning and I know this last one sounds a little weird, I'll explain it but it was a city of winks as well, mainly because I needed another "w" but we'll explain that. So let's talk about Sardis. Sardis knew and had been the victim many times of war. The earliest reference we have in literature to Sardis is in a book called "The Persians of Aeschylus" written in 472 BC. In "The Iliad" it's referred to as a place called "Hyde" and that is the city of Sardis. It became the capital of the Maonian kingdom in the 8th century BC and it was a great city of influence during the Lydian kingdom and because it was such a wealthy city in such a predominant place, it became very often a target for conquest and for war. It was captured by the Cimmerians in the 7th century BC, by the Persians in the 6th century, by the Athenians in the 5th century, by Antiochus III, the Great, at the end of the 3rd century BC and it was conquered by Cyrus the Great during the Persian era. Then during the Ionian Revolt, the Athenians burnt the city to the ground and it was rebuilt but it remained under Persian domination until it surrendered to Alexander the Great in 334 BC.

So they knew a lot about war. They had been the victim of it and we're going to talk about two specific occasions of war that really have a great spiritual application for us in a few moments. It's also a city of work and you see there on the map on the right hand side, Sardis is located about halfway between Pergamum on the north and Smyrna on the south and just to the west of Philadelphia. It's about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira which we talked about last week and they had important industries. They made wool there and they dyed it and they had textiles and they were a wealthy city. They also formed the end of an east-west road that ran through the Persian empire. It was called the Persian Royal Road and it became at Persepolis, the capital of Persia and ended in Sardis. The early Lydian kingdom was very advanced for its time and Sardis was the chief seat of all the things that it manufactured, mainly the delicate woolen stuff, carpets and things of that nature that you couldn't get anywhere else.

There was a stream that flowed through Sardis called the Pactolus, the name of a small river or stream and they noticed one day looking at the stream that the water had an unusual golden sheen to it and it carried golden sands. It turns out that this was gold dust out of Mount Tmolus and they began learning how to pan for gold and they got a lot of gold that way and that added to the city's wealth. Now, you may have heard about a king if you've studied some literature, King Croesus. He's not just a mythical personage. He was actually an historical figure and while he was reigning, the metallurgists in Sardis discovered something phenomenal that still affects us to this day: they discovered how to separate and purify gold and silver. Now, this had never been done before and so when you wanted to trade previously, you'd use some golden nuggets that might have some gold, might have some silver. Nobody was ever quite sure how pure that nugget was and so, you know, it was kind of like your best guess whether or not you're being paid fairly for whatever product or service that you were rendering. But they discovered how to

separate it. In fact, this gold and silver often came together out of the same mine. They are often combined in a substance called electrum and so they had to separate them and they figured out how to do this in Sardis and to purify it and so for the first time in human history, we really have pure gold and pure silver that could then be minted into coins of a certain size and weight making a common denomination and so Sardis is the place where real money was born. They established and it made them very wealthy because of this discovery during the reign of King Croesus.

By the way, they established the qualities of money. Now, this maybe is not germane to this subject but you need to understand what real money is. It must be durable and so, in other words, we don't use stuff today when we go to the store, we don't trade in stuff that would eventually decay. It has to be divisible so you don't use artwork because it couldn't be like, "Okay, well, I'll give you the Mona Lisa but it's not quite worth that so I'm going to keep her arm and half of her smile." You know, it wouldn't work out too well. It has to be something that's easily divisible; you make change in it. It has to be convenient. That's why we don't carry around lead or copper because it would take a whole lot of copper or a pretty heavy pocket worth of lead to do anything. It has to be consistent, that's why we don't use real estate because every piece of property is different. It has to possess value in itself. By the way, today we use paper and we carry \$20 bills, \$10 bills, \$100 bills and you need to understand something, you need to remember this if you don't remember anything else: what you have in your wallet that's got pictures of Presidents is not money, it's currency. Let me repeat that again: it's not money, it's currency because those papers do not have any value in and of themselves. One of the characteristics of money is it must have value in and of itself. So you may have currency in your pocket but unless you're carrying some gold and silver coins today, you do not have any money with you. You need to understand the difference between those. It must be limited in the quantity that's available so we don't use aluminum or iron because they're just way too abundant and if it's too abundant they wouldn't have any value. It has to be have a long history of acceptance which is why we don't use molybdenum or rhodium or things like that.

The fact of the matter is that the only two things that historically have ever met these seven definitions of what money is are gold and silver and it goes back to Sardis who helped us first get those coins. Our Founding Fathers, in fact, understood this principle so well and understood the significance of what Sardis did so well that in Article 1, Section 10 of the US Constitution it says this, "No State shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation; grant letters of marque and reprisal; coin money; emit bills of credit," now listen to this, "make anything but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts." So the Founding Fathers said, "Nothing should ever be regarded as payment for debts except gold and silver." That is still in the Constitution, by the way. We've ignored that. We've passed laws that allowed us to create First Federal Reserve notes that were backed by gold and then during Richard Nixon's administration, he removed the backing of gold and now currency is just worthless paper. It has a value because the government says it has a value but in reality it's not worth any more than any other piece of paper that you would pick up. So you need to understand that's currency and it's important for you to know that if you're wise, you're doing something to convert some of your currency into real money at some point.

Sardis was not only a place of wealth but it was a city of worship. Now, they had a temple to Artemis there and the temple we'll talk about in a little bit because it was like a building project that never finished, but people still go to worship. It was kind of like there was a temple, it wasn't quite completed but they go to worship but it was forbidden in Sardian law to approach the temple of Artemis in dirty clothes. You could only come to the temple if you were wearing clean, white raiment. In fact, if you came in dirty clothes, they took it so seriously that they went to the rolls of the city that listed all of its citizenship and they would blot your name out of the book and they would kick you out of the city so this is a big deal. They took their worship very seriously.

It was a center of pagan worship. Again, I mention they had a temple there to Artemis. Now, the Roman name for Artemis is Diana and, of course, this is goddess of the moon but she's also called a huntress. She's often pictured as she is here with a bow and arrow and dragging a stag that she's killed. You've got to like this woman, actually, you know, she likes to go deer hunting. That's our kind of women, ladies, so just listen up to that. But she was also the goddess of virginity and the guardian of young girls. But they started building this temple in about the 4th century BC and never finished it and then along came an earthquake in AD 17 and they never went back and really did a whole lot of repairs to it. It was kind of like they were afraid that the next earthquake would probably just undo all their repairs so why bother trying. We still see the remains of this temple to this day. Now, one thing I want to point out about this that's rather interesting is that in the southeast corner of the ruins of the temple of Artemis is the ruins of a Christian church. Think about this for just a minute: inside the temple to a goddess, a church was meeting. Now, just let that marinate a little bit in your heads and we'll talk more about it in a moment.

All that's left of Sardis today is there is a small village called Sart on this once important city. Sart itself was of no great value. There is some beautiful architecture there. You can see this is a picture of a Corinthian column. There are also Ionian columns and other things so it's a rich place for architecture. But I think it is significant that Christianity didn't do a good job of separating itself from paganism in Sardis, instead it moved into the same building and it kind of makes me wonder about churches today that bring in worldly entertainment and worldly values and worldly dress and worldly language all in the name of reaching the world and yet what really happens is that instead of reaching the world for Christ, they just wind up having a worldly church. That's the real issue.

There was a Jewish synagogue in Sardis and the Jews held a lot of influence in Sardian society and they often became the business leaders because of their practices there. So they were a city of wealth.

Now, they're also a city of winks. By that, I mean 40 winks. Some of you look like you could use another 39 winks this morning. This is a holiday weekend and you're all supposed to be rested by now. Don't you know that? Yet everybody is just tired. Well, Sardis seemed if you were looking at it from the outside, you would think, "This is a city that's impossible to conquer." It had high cliffs on about three sides of the city and they

had a well constructed garrison on the other entrance to the city. In fact, in 546 BC, the Persian king, Cyrus, laid siege to the city for 14 days and made absolutely no progress. Now, one night though, a Persian soldier happened to notice that a Sardian soldier who was on top of the walls dropped his helmet and so he went down and there was a little path hidden by some bushes on the outside of the cliff and he went down this little path and he got his helmet and the Persian soldier noticed this and so that night while Sardis was asleep, they made their way up this little path on the side of the cliff that was well hidden and they entered into the city and conquered the city while it was still asleep. Now, it was such an astounding thing that it gave rise to a phrase in literature talking about capturing Sardis. When you said, "Oh, So-and-so captured Sardis this week," you didn't necessarily mean that the city had been captured, you meant somebody did something that was seemingly impossible because for so long, Sardis, conquering it had seemed impossible and now somebody had gone and done it. So when you said, "Oh, he can capture Sardis," you meant, "He can do the impossible," because if you can capture Sardis, you can do anything.

Well, interestingly enough, Alexander the Great came along a little later and there was a guard that fell asleep at his post and while the guard was asleep in the middle of the night, Alexander the Great's men scaled the walls and got into the city and so twice in history Sardis was defeated because it was asleep. Now, that's going to be significant when we read what Jesus says to the church at Sardis and why he says when he gives a list of commands to the church, his first command to the church at Sardis is, "Wake up you're asleep. Wake up." And he wants us to know that.

It's also a city of waning. It's sad but by the time Jesus dictates this letter to the Christians who are living in Sardis, Sardis was no longer the once great city it had been and neither is the church, the once great church it had been. Basically, they were resting on their past laurels. They were resting on the fact that at one time they had been the end of the trade route along the Persian Royal Road and in AD 17, most of the city was wiped out and they rebuilt just a former glimpse of what the original city was but everybody was like, "Eh, why bother rebuilding. We can just have another earthquake." The same thing is true of the church. Jesus tells them that basically, "You have a reputation that you're alive but you're really just dead. You really are nothing." The church had made peace with surrounding society. They even had met in the temple of Artemis and consequently they didn't amount to anything.

Now, they did have an interesting witness in Sardis so they were a city of witness in that they had a book that was kept near the gate of the city and it had a written record of every occupant to the city so if you lived in Sardis, your name was in the book. Now, if you died, they came along and they blotted your name out of the book and they carried your body about seven miles outside of the city to what's called a necropolis. A necropolis is a city of tombs and basically they had a very big city of tombs so it had huge burial mounds out there where the kings of the past were buried. They had caves into the side of the hills where people were buried. They had monuments there and if you go out and look at it, there were all these monuments to all the dead. It was like a city for the dead.

Also, if you committed a crime or you were found unworthy or you dared go to the temple of Artemis in dirty clothing, they would cross your name out of the book and they would kick you out of the city. So when you were gone on a business trip though, and you came back to Sardis, you came to the gate of Sardis where the gatekeeper was and he looked to see if your name was in the book. Now, if your name was in the book, they didn't have a whole lot of television back then or radio or any other form of entertainment so basically if your name was in the book, the gatekeeper would cry out loud to the whole city, "Roger is back!" You know, they would call out his name and it was a comforting thing to know that your name was still in the book and you still got to be in the city and everybody got to hear that Roger had made it back into the city. Some day we're going to get to hear our names called when we enter the heavenly city because the Lamb of God will read our names out of the book of life. Won't that be interesting?

Sardis was also a city of wellness. They were preoccupied with physical fitness and health. The fact is, they built facilities that rivaled any health facilities in the old world. Here is the gymnasium at Sardis. It still stands to this day. The earthquake didn't get it and so they had this gymnasium that became...and you can see there another picture of it there and how it's surrounded by walkways and paths. It was a very elaborate place and you can see a little bit more of the scale of it here as you see some people in the foreground. This was a significant gymnasium and people would go here to work out and they would go here to get healthy and this is long before Jack LaLanne came on the scene. They had a series of Roman baths and so you see there two separate views of the Roman baths. The picture on the right is the same pool as the one on the left but you see a little bit more of what's to the right of the pool there. So the Roman baths, you'd go there and they would bring in hot mineral springs and things of that nature and pour that water in there and they were concerned about those things. So they were a city that was preoccupied by wellness.

Now, in this letter like all of the seven letters to the churches, it starts out by identifying Jesus Christ and every letter describes Jesus just a little bit differently. In this one, it says two things about Jesus. It's says first of all that he holds the seven spirits of God. Now, we've talked about what that meant before in Revelation 1. It doesn't mean that God necessarily has seven spirits but seven is the number of perfection or completion and it does mention in Isaiah that God has a spirit of wisdom, a spirit of understanding, a spirit of counsel, a spirit of might and it mentions seven different characteristics of the Spirit of God. So it's not seven spirits, it's just the Holy Spirit but it is a perfect Holy Spirit that has all the qualities that we need and it says here that Jesus holds or controls, really is what it means, the Spirit of God. Now, you have to understand that we have in the Godhead, in God, there is a Trinity. Now, this is unique to Christians. Nobody else has a Trinity but it's not astounding to us. It shouldn't be. Water is a trinity. There is a chemical called H₂O but it has three different forms, doesn't it? If you freeze it it turns into ice, that's a solid. If it's unfrozen, it's a liquid that you can drink. And if you get it hot enough, it turns into a gas called steam that has incredible power if you harness it. So how many different kinds of water are there? Well there are three different kinds. In fact, you can take any substance in nature and if you get it cold enough it's a solid, you get it hot enough and it's liquid and you get it hotter still and it will vaporize and turn into a gas. Why? Because

everything is a trinity. The Bible says, "The invisible things of him," that is God, "are clearly seen in the foundation of the world, even his eternal power and Godhead."

Now, how many kinds of time do we have? There are only three. There is past, there is present and there is future. There are only three kinds of time. How many dimensions do we live in? There is height, there is length and depth. We live in a three dimensional world and everything in science can be categorized into different areas but how many kinds of energy are there? There is kinetic energy, there is light energy and there is binding force or binding potential energy; the things that keeps stuff together; it keeps them glued together; or molecular bond energy, we might call that. Everything in science can be explained in one of three scientific continuums: space, time and matter. And everything in science fits under one of those three scientific continuums. Now, isn't it fascinating that in all of creation, there are only three scientific continuums? Within time, there are only three kinds of time; within space, there are only three dimensions; and within matter, everything can exist in three different forms. It's a trinity. It should not surprise us then that if God says, "My creation reveals me," that God himself is a Trinity. He's Father, he's Son and he's Holy Spirit and they are all God. They are only one God.

Every Jew stepped out of his house every morning and said the Shema which was an Israeli prayer that says, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God." What they didn't understand is this is one God that he reveals himself to us as three persons. There is God the Father that rules sovereign over all of creation. There is Jesus Christ who redeems us. He died for our sins because we can never be good enough to impress the Father. Every other religion in the world is the same, they have a balance scale and they say if you are good enough, if you've done enough good stuff, if you've done enough works, you'll make it to heaven. But Christianity is different because there isn't enough good you can do. If you've told one lie, what are you? Somebody? A liar. If you've ever stolen one thing, what are you? A thief. If you've ever looked after one person to lust after them, what are you? You're an adulterer. So by that definition, most of us here, it could honestly be said of us that we are lying, thieving adulterers and you only had to do one lie or one stolen thing or one act of lust to be guilty of those things and the Bible says that if you are guilty of any one breaking of a commandment, you're guilty of breaking the whole law of God. So it doesn't matter. You could be good from now until the day you die and you would never do enough good to not still be a lying, thieving adulterer. So what do we have to have? We have to have a perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins. Somebody who is perfect had to be willing to take my punishment upon himself and that's what Jesus did for me on the cross. Jesus who never broke the law of God, who lived an absolutely righteous life, died like a criminal during the days of the Roman Empire for one reason: because he loves me, because he loves you. He took your whopping upon himself. He paid the price for your sins. That is the one thing that happens. Now, the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Godhead and his job is to point people to Jesus. So even though there is one God who reveals himself in three ways, the Spirit points people to Jesus, people are redeemed when they receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and once they're redeemed and because they've received Christ as their Savior, then he points them to the Father.

By the way, it's an important thing that you understand this is currency, by the way, not money, that there is something important you understand. So how many of you, this appears to be a one dollar bill, how many of you believe it's a one dollar bill? Okay, some of you are skeptical because you just think any time I'm doing something, I'm out to trick you but this actually was printed by our United States government and it's got that little thing on it that says, "This note is legal tender for all debts public and private," which of course, contradicts the Constitution of the United States which says only gold and silver can do you that. But it is a real dollar bill. There's not a whole lot you can do with it anymore but if you put it with another one, you could probably go down to the Dairy Queen and get one ice cream cone with it. Now, how many of you believe you can get one ice cream cone with at least two one dollar bills? Let me see your hands. Okay. You all go and do that. You see, there's a problem though isn't there? The problem is that I could tell you to go to Dairy Queen and get an ice cream cone with those two one dollar bills, the problem is the two one dollar bills are still up here with me. That won't do you any good. Why? You believe these dollar bills but you haven't received these dollar bills and see, it's not enough to believe in Jesus, the way you become a Christian is to receive Jesus. When I put these dollar bills in my hand, then I can go to the Dairy Queen and when I ask Jesus Christ, "Lord, forgive me of my sins. I can never do enough righteous to impress you but I want you to come into my heart, become my Lord, become my Savior, I receive you as my God and as my King." That changes you. That's why the Bible never says, "But as many as believed him, they became the sons of God." It says, "But as many as received him," John 1:12, "but as many as received him, he gave the power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name." It's not enough to believe, you have to receive. A lot of people grow up in church and they hear stories about Jesus and they kind of believe it. They kind of accept it and yet they get to the end of their life and they're going to find out that if all they ever did was believe it, it's not enough. There has to be a point in your life where you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior and it is the job of the Holy Spirit to help point you to Christ so that you receive him.

The second thing we notice about Christ here is it says that he holds in his hands the angels or the messengers. Remember, the word "angelos" in Greek means "messenger." In this case, he's talking about the pastors. He holds in his hands the pastors of the seven churches. In other words, God has a special calling on the lives of these men to preach the word of God and to minister the word of God to the people in those congregations; they are there by his appointment. By the way, there is at least one famous pastor we know about from the city of Sardis and this was Melito. He was a pastor during the second century. He was renowned for his piety and learning. He often visited Palestine and the area around Jerusalem because he wanted to verify for himself the accuracy of the Old Testament canon, in other words, what books were going to make it in the Old Testament and what books they should actually be studying as Christians in the Old Testament. Now, the Old Testament has got a lot of the history of the Middle East in it. It's got a lot of the history of basically how God dealt with people before the cross, before Jesus died to pay for our sins, and it has picture upon picture upon picture in the Old Testament of things that represent Jesus Christ. They are like the shadows that fall backwards on the Old Testament from the cross and if you know who Jesus is, you can see pictures of him in the Old Testament. So he wanted to make sure that what we accept

today as the Old Testament really were accurate books and he checked that out for himself.

He even wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse and remember "Apocalypse" comes from the Greek word "apocalypsos" which is the title of the book of Revelation. So he wrote a commentary on this book. Now, think about how odd that would be that he wrote a commentary on Revelation while he was a pastor of Sardis and Sardis is the one church to whom Jesus says absolutely nothing good. There wasn't one redeemable quality about Sardis in this letter. That's really rather fascinating but it is interesting that Jesus holds in his hands the pastors of the churches. By the way, let me just encourage you, I would love for all of us to stay together forever. I like this, this is family, but let me encourage you if God sends you forth into some other part of the world and you go to some other church, be careful how you treat your pastor because Jesus holds pastors in his hand if they are his men. Now, I realize there are some pastors that aren't called to a church. They call themselves there. They chose the preaching and it's their own profession. I knew a guy one time that was just sitting around the dorm room at SMU and his buddy said, "Oh, I think you'd make a good pastor," and he said, "Oh, I think I'll do that." That was not my experience. I didn't want to be a pastor. God just wouldn't leave me alone until I agreed to be one. It was a different thing. God called me and I know that God put me into the ministry. We're all in the ministry, by the way. It doesn't mean that there is a clergy and a laity. We're all kings and priests to our God if we're Christians. We all are supposed to serve him. We're all supposed to pray. We're all supposed to witness. We're all supposed to lead in worship. But God does call some men to be pastors and I do mean he calls men, by the way. It's real hard for a pastor to be the husband of one wife if you're a woman. I don't apologize for that. God said it. So there was a faithful pastor. Be careful though. A lot of churches had the pastor who every Sunday for lunch and I don't mean they invited him over for lunch, I mean they ate him up for lunch and we need to be careful about how we speak of God's anointed.

Now, every one of these letters in the seven churches, Christ gives some word of commendation to except this one. Remember how I've taught the last few weeks that if you're a parent one good thing to do is to say some good praising words to your children before you give them correction? Jesus really doesn't have anything good to say about this church. Basically the only thing he says about this church, he says, "You have a reputation that you're alive," and that's as good as it gets. It all goes downhill from here. He says, "You have a reputation that you're alive but you're dead." Now, I remember going to Taiwan the first time in 1982 and one of the treats for me that I love to do when I was in Taiwan was go shopping for groceries. Now, over here and I don't know how it is now because it's been several years since I've been to Taiwan but over here we walk into Kroger's or you walk into a Walmart grocery or wherever you do your shopping and you go and you pick out packages of things like chicken. Maybe you decide you're going to have fried chicken tonight and you go and buy Pilgrim's Pride chicken because you know they don't have arsenic in their feed and Holly Farms chicken does and it just scares you that your eating chicken with arsenic. So you go and you get good quality chicken or you go and get a pork roast or whatever but you go and buy your food and you bring it home and you cook it. Well, when I was in Taiwan in 1982, you didn't go buy

chicken packaged in styrofoam and cellophane. You went down to the market and you saw some chickens walking around and you said, "I want that black one over there with kind of the yellow spot on its wings," and they said, "Okay," and they went and got that chicken and they would take the chicken's neck and bend it back and they took a little pocket knife and they just slit it real quick and basically it caused the chicken's head to kind of come off. They had a metal box that was about this high and about that wide and about that deep and they put the chicken, the headless chicken, in the box and I want to tell you because I've heard it and I've seen it for myself, that was a very active chicken. Now, you need to understand something: chickens can be active even when they are dead. That chicken had no head. He had no brain signals going anywhere anymore but it was an active chicken.

Now, also many years, chickens are not the only thing. I was in Marble Falls, Texas, that's down in Llano county out in West Texas. Years ago, one of my last two years in high school, I was with the mayor of Jacksonville, Texas on his deer lease and I'd never hunted deer but give me a gun and a walkie-talkie and I think I'm happy. So we all get separated and we're going different ways and we were setting up deer stands which we did that day and I'm kind of scouting out the deer lease and I tried calling this guy on the walkie-talkie and I couldn't get him. I thought, "Maybe I need to get to a higher elevation," so I saw this big giant chunk of rock, it was easily as tall as the ceiling in here and I thought, "I'm going to walk to the top of that rock and I'll see if I can get better reception up there." The rock over the time because of weather, water getting in cracks and the rock freezing, had developed a huge crack so there was a crack about that wide in the rock. So I'm walking up the rock, thank God I was wearing Dan Post boots that day. They were those pointy boots. I call them pig-stickers because if I ever kicked a pig, it would have stuck right there on the end of the boot. And so I'm walking up the rock with my pig-stickers and I step across and all of a sudden I hear this sound and something hits the bottom of my boot and it was a rattlesnake. Fortunately, he didn't get through the boot but he encouraged me to move faster in my climb up the rock.

There are a couple of things I just don't have a lot of use for and snakes are one and spiders are the other. I got higher on the rock and, of course, I got the guy on the phone and I said, "Come help me. There is a rattlesnake and I can't get back down without crossing the rattlesnake." So I did try to come back down the rock and as soon as I got close, I heard those rattles shaking again. That snake was mad because I had invaded his territory. So finally, I took the pistol that I had with me and you usually don't want to shoot into a rock because they have this nasty phenomena called ricochet that you really want to avoid. But I wasn't getting down so I would point the pistol at him and I would shoot but I'd keep my head back out of the way. Somehow or other, I don't know how you do this when you can't see where you're aiming but I did manage to get a bullet right through the middle of the rattlesnake's head. At that point, the rattlesnake was dead but this idiot didn't know it for about six hours because we got him, the guy finally came and he said, "Oh, let's take that back and make it into, we'll put it up on a plaque or we'll turn it into a belt or hat band or something." The snake was 7 1/2 feet long, you could have turned it into a king sized bed probably. It was a 7 1/2 foot long rattlesnake and he's about this big around and he wants me to carry it. Well, I'm not touching the thing. So I'm

carrying it on a stick which makes leverage work against you because this heavy body is dragging you down and you're trying to hold it up. I walked back and I don't know how long with that stick and the whole time this dead rattlesnake was very active moving up and down, undulating, curling. It kind of creeped me out, to be quite frank with you.

But do you know what? Here we have a church that Jesus basically says, "I don't have anything good to say about you other than the fact that you have a reputation that you're alive, kind of like a chicken with its head cut off or a rattlesnake with its head blown off. You're still moving but the reality is that you are dead." Now, I think it is interesting that they had a reputation they were alive. It meant that probably if other churches looked at the church at Sardis they thought, "They've got nice digs. They are occupying a corner of a temple and the temple is pretty elaborate. That's pretty cool. Hey, they've got good numbers going on and it seems like they've got lots of activities. They are scheduling meetings three or four times a week. It looks like a lot is happening." But he says, "You have a reputation that you're alive," but he says this, "I know your works and you are dead." By the way, in every other letter, when Jesus says to a church, "I know your works," he starts listing good things about them but when he says it to the church at Sardis and says, "I know your works," he doesn't say one single good thing about it. He says, "You have a reputation that you are alive but you're dead. You're the walking dead. You're zombies when it comes to being a church. You're the church of the living dead." Jesus points out that while Sardis may be fooling everybody else about how alive they are, they don't fool Jesus.

Matthew 23, I'm reminded of these words that Jesus said. He said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" By the way, Jesus was never popular by calling the Jewish religious leaders of the day "hypocrites" but that's what he did. "For ye are like unto whited sepulchres," in other words, you're like a tomb that's been painted white on the outside, "which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Now, let me explain something: it doesn't matter how good you look on the outside to other people, Jesus still sees what's on the inside and if it's rotten, it's rotten. It doesn't matter how many people would show up at your funeral and say, "Oh, he was a really good guy. He was a great spiritual leader. He was a good family man. He did all these things," and yet Jesus saw your heart and he knew you were playing a game the whole time. I wonder how many of us Jesus would look at today and say to us, "You have a reputation that you're really alive but spiritually there just isn't much there anymore because you're not really living the Christian life." You see, that's convicting because there are times that I'm like that. That's convicting because there are times that I let things so crowd God out of my life and out of my time that if you looked at my spiritual life from week to week, it didn't make any progress. There was no signs of life. Now, I would love to think that I'm the only one here that ever has that problem but I kind of doubt it.

So, he didn't have any general commendation but there is one thing that he says. He says, "But there is a group there who are still faithful, whose clothes are not soiled." By the way, in Greek there are two different ways of saying "but" and he uses the strongest word

here which means this group that is still faithful and are still walking with Christ are in stark contrast to the rest of the church. If you had soiled garments, you were removed from the list of citizens in Sardis because it was illegal to approach their gods with dirty clothing. He says, "But there are still a few in the church there that when they approach me, their lives are clean and they will walk with me and they will fellowship with me but it's just a few." It's like a few burning embers left over from a fire. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Now Jesus, again, in all but two of the letters gives some criticism to the church. He tells them what's wrong and he says, "You've got a problem with pride." And if you think about the areas they had pride in, they were linked to the kind of city they were. First of all, he said, "You pride yourself in being this towering acropolis, this fully alive church but you're more like the necropolis, the city of the living dead." He said, "You like to talk about how alive you are and you have this reputation that you're doing stuff for Christ but you're really like that city seven miles away where you bury all your dead people and you erect monuments to them and there is as much life in that necropolis as there is in your church." I've got to tell you, after 34 years of preaching the Gospel, I have been to some dead churches. Now, I'll tell you a little shame-on-me story, one of those things from my hall of shame. I don't have a hall of fame, I have a hall of shame. The first time I ever came to this church, I thought, "They need to bulldoze this and put up a sign that says Ichabod, the glory has departed." I thought it was the deadest church I'd ever been in and I tell you that because it makes me grateful to God every time I see you and see people who are interested in hearing the word of God that when we got rid of some compromise, God began to bless us and he sent us the families that we have today.

But they had another problem of pride. He said, "You know, you pride yourself on your secure position. You've got cliffs on three sides of you. You've got a garrison at the front door. You're well protected. You think that you have a good solid standing as my redeemed, as baptized believers and a worshiping community. But you've become vulnerable to the enemy because spiritually you're asleep. You don't see the danger coming because you're no longer alert to them. You've forgotten the lessons of history." And just as Sardis had been destroyed twice while they were asleep, he said, "You've gone to sleep spiritually and you don't see what's happened to you."

He said, "You take pride in your ability to dye wool and fabricate garments and make beautiful rugs for people but in reality, you've soiled your clothes. You're unacceptable to me. You can't come and worship me because you look so much like the world and it's hard to even tell the difference. The fact is, you even worship inside of a pagan temple." Then he says, "You pride yourself on being physically fit and going to the gym but I know your deeds. You may have a reputation of being physically alive but spiritually, you're pretty much dead. You're on your last breath. You're not doing anything for the Lord." In a nutshell, you could say of Sardis that the church of Sardis was more of a cemetery than a church.

Now, I think it's important that you know the strategy of the enemy. I think there are some enemies that the United States has today and we need to be aware of the strategies that they're using to basically enslave a population of its citizens and I think there's a group of people who are trying to bring out the ruin in this country from within. But Satan has a strategy too and I like to call it Satan's Sardian strategy because I noticed something about the letters to the seven churches. In every other church, Satan has attacked the church directly but not so here. In Ephesus he says, "You've got false apostles. You've got the Nicolaitans. There's lots of hardships. Life is tough in Ephesus." When he talked to Smyrna, he says, "I know that there are Jews there from the synagogue of Satan that believers are being falsely imprisoned and Christ asked you to be faithful unto death." When you get to Pergamos, we read how there was a believer by the name of Antipas that was martyred for his faith. In Thyatira, we know that there was intense physical suffering and that Satan was trying to seduce people into immorality. But in Sardis, in the letter to the church at Sardis, you find not one mention of the devil. Not one. Not a single mention. He doesn't even say the devil's out to get you. He doesn't talk about the problems that they're facing. He just says, "You're dead as a doornail." But see, just as Alexander the Great and King Cyrus conquered the Sardians while they were asleep, Satan's strategy for the Sardian church was to lull believers into a deep sleep, let them feel secure and comfortable in their faith and then sneak in and destroy them.

I'm convinced this is his strategy for our church. I'm convinced this is his strategy for churches in America. You see, if you're a Christian in the Middle East right now, you're being persecuted. Right now, there are Christians every week being beheaded for their faith in the Middle East. There are Christians in China being put into prison for their faith. You see, it's hard to get complacent when you have to die for your faith but here in the United States, we're so comfortable and we can enjoy so many things and we can enjoy the prosperity and the Sunday afternoon naps and football season is on it's way back. We get so comfortable that we get lulled into thinking that just because we go to church and we have a nice Christian family and we say prayers before meals, that that's all there is to Christianity and Satan is lulling us into sleep and not letting us see the destruction that's coming upon our children and our children's children until it's too late. Satan's strategy is to keep us busy with commerce and making things and fabricating appearances.

By the way, Jesus says to this church, he says, "I know your works and they are not complete." That's kind of a weird comment. He says, "I know your works and they're not finished. They're not complete." You see, the Sardians never finished anything they started. They started building the temple of Artemis, five centuries later, the temple is still not done. And he says to the church, "When I as God look upon your church, I see that you've never finished anything you started for me. You came up with a lot of good plans and a lot of good programs but you never actually did anything that was of eternal value and consequence." Why not? Their enthusiasm had waned. They had no perseverance.

Now, what are the commands because in every one of these seven churches, Jesus gives some personal instructions and the first thing he says, "Wake up." Now, if you're a

corpse, the words "wake up" probably don't help but I have been in a lot of intensive care rooms over the last 3 ½ decades and I've been there when a lot of people breathe their last. I could hear it when they got that death rattle in their throat and I knew that they had only minutes left to live. I also have seen a lot of people in comas and you would go in and you would pray with them and you would talk with them because they say hearing is the last sense to go and sometimes people wake up from a coma and they can remember what they heard so you minister to them anyway by faith. Sometimes you just want to go in there and I remember being in a hospital room in Mother Frances Hospital in Tyler, Texas when my own brother was in a coma and he'd been in a coma for five days. He had a temperature of 106 degrees and that was after they'd iced him down. If he'd gone one more degree, it would have destroyed his brain. I remember that every time I went in there, I just wanted my brother to wake up. A coma is just about that far from death and I would just go in there, "Fred, wake up. Fred, wake up."

Jesus is saying to this church, "You're in a coma. You're that far from losing it all. Wake up. Wake up and become alert again." You see, there is a kind of sleep we have that you don't have to close your eyes for. It's the kind of sleep that you go through life and you just live life unaware of the spiritual dangers around you. By the way, I'm not a great fan of fiction books but if I was going to recommend a set of fiction books to read, they'd be by Frank Peretti. One is called "Piercing the Darkness," and another one is, I don't know, maybe Melody can help me remember, "Through the Darkness." Those books talk about the fact that spiritual warfare is going on all around us. So you don't realize it right now but right now the demons of hell are engaged in battle with the angels of heaven even about whether or not you'll hear this sermon and about whether or not you'll take its truths to your heart. And maybe you're here and you've never received Jesus as your Savior. He wants to get you to asking all kinds of questions except the most important one: "Jesus, will you become my Lord and Savior? Will you come into my heart and save me?" Some of you, he's already managed to distract with thoughts of lunch and plans for the rest of the day and what you're doing tomorrow on your day off when the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you, "You know, there are some areas of your life you're asleep in. You haven't been reading the word. You haven't been spending any time in prayer and when you do pray, it's for meals. You haven't been praying for God to move mountains. You haven't told anybody about Jesus lately. You've gone to sleep spiritually and you're going through the motions like you're sleep walking through your Christianity. What are you going to do?"

He says, "Wake up. Give evidence of being alive and fruitful. See the dangers around you that could destroy your witness." Then he says, "Strengthen what remains." There wasn't much left in Sardis but there was a handful of people who still had clean garments meaning not that they were just wearing clothes that had been washed in the washing machine with Tide but meaning that they had kept their hearts pure toward God and he says, "Strengthen that. Build more. Start having prayer meetings. Start praying for the others that need to repent. Strengthen what little is left while you still have it. Strengthen the basics: your Bible reading, your prayer, your witnessing, your mediation on Scripture, your fasting."

Then he says, "Remember." He says, "There are two things you need to remember: one is the word of God that you heard." You know, the Bible is different than any other book that's ever been written because it was written over a period of 1,600 years, over 2,500 square miles by 40 different authors and yet it never contradicts itself. It is all one word. It's prophecies have been proven true over and over and over again and the Old Testament gave detailed information about the birth, the death and even the resurrection of Christ 500 years before Jesus was ever born. That cannot be said of any other book ever and we have the original manuscripts that date back more than 500 years before the birth of Christ so we know it's true. What an amazing thing. It's the word of God. He says, "You heard the word of God but more than hearing it, you did," what? "You received it. You took it into your hands. You asked Jesus to be your Savior. You knew that there was no requirements you could meet to become a Christian because there is nothing you can do that will impress God but you received the fact that Jesus loved you and died for your sins." He says, "Remember that."

Then he says, "Keep the word. Hold on to what you have left. Don't let it go." When he says "keep the word" he doesn't just mean "hold onto your Bibles." He doesn't just mean "make sure nobody steals your Bible." What he means is "keep his commandments." Do what he tells you to do. Jesus says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me and he that loves me, I love him and I will reveal myself to him," John 14:21. If you've ever bent over the deathbed of a loved one and you weren't quite ready to let go of them, you may have whispered in their ear, "Fight for your life. Hang on. Come back to us." That's what Jesus is saying.

Then he says, "Repent." Now, this word means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. If you talk to a Mormon, for example, repentance is more of a ceremonial kind of thing they do. What repentance really means is to acknowledge before God that you are a sinner. The Bible says very clearly, "For all have sinned." That means me. That means you. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God but to repent means, "I acknowledge that I'm a sinner but I want to turn away from my sins," and the only alternative to sin and death is Jesus Christ and eternal life and turn toward Jesus and say, "God, I don't want that sin. I want Jesus," and we turn toward him. When Jesus tells this church to repent, he uses an aorist imperative verb which means "repent and do it now because if you wait it may be too late." I don't know if you know this but when the Holy Spirit of God is moving on your heart that you need to do something. He might move on your heart this week and he may move on your heart next week but there's no guarantee he'll still be moving on your heart a couple of months from now because by then your heart could be so hardened you'll never open it to him. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, let him open the door and I'll come in to him and I'll fellowship with him." He says, "But you know, he's only going to knock so long." People knock long enough and they finally walk away from the door, don't they?

Here's the warning. Here's what happens if you don't repent. He says, "If you do not watch," by the way, Sardis was famous for not watching. Alexander the Great destroyed Sardis because the guard was asleep. Cyrus destroyed Sardis because the city was asleep

and he found a way up the side of the precipice. Jesus says, "If you don't watch, if you don't start being spiritually alert, your church will cease to exist." He says, "I'll come like a thief in the night. You won't know what hour I come at." By the way, I want to say this in love but we spend a lot of time fearing the wrong things. I don't know what you fear. I think a lot about what I believe is going to be the coming economic collapse of this country and I spend a lot of time thinking about how to prepare for it, what to do for it. But let me tell you something: don't sweat the economic collapse. A lot of times people are scared of the devil and he's big, he's intimidating, he's smarter than you and I are and he will destroy your family but do you know what? Not one time in the Bible am I told to fear the devil. I am told to resist him and he'll flee from me. I am told that only in the case of lustfulness and fornication am I to flee his presence. But who are we to fear? Matthew 10:28, Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who will kill body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Who's that? It's God. He's the only one that can do that. Revelation 1:17-18, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Don't fear Satan, fear God. Jesus has the keys of death and hell. Matthew 24, "But understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." I don't know how long it is until Jesus returns but I know he's returning. He's alive. He was seen by over 500 people at one time and there are no such things as mass hallucinations. He's real and he said, "I'm going." The fact is that when he ascended up into heaven, all his disciples stood there just looking at him and going, "Wow," and suddenly two angels appear and they say, "Why are you standing here looking up into heaven? This same Jesus is coming back in the clouds in like manner as you've just seen him go. He's coming back." I'll bank on that, folks.

He's coming back and we'd better be ready. 1 Thessalonians 5, "Now brothers, about times and dates we do not write to you." You see, they didn't give us a time or date when he was going to come back. Beware of anybody that thinks they've got that figured out. "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, Peace and safety," everything is fine, folks. We have a president that's telling us that now. That's the biggest lie hatched in the halls of hell. He says, "While people are saying, Peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape." 2 Peter and here's that memory verse, "Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like 1000 years, and 1000 years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God doesn't want anybody to go into hell. He loves you. He's crazy about you. He sent his own Son to die for you that's how much he loves you. I love all of you but I don't think I'd give up a single one of my kids for you. That would be awful hard. But Jesus did. He says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holiness and righteousness?" You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed

its coming. "That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Then Jesus gives you a promise and all of his letters end with a promise. He says, "If you will overcome, if you wake up, if you remain faithful, if you don't soil your clothes with compromise with the world and unrighteousness, if you're faithful to me, here's what you get. First of all, you'll be clothed in white raiment." That means that you're going to be able just like in Sardis they couldn't approach the temple of Artemis unless they were wearing clean white raiment, he's telling the Sardians because they understand this picture that, "You'll be able for all eternity to approach me because you will be permanently righteous." Do you know what? I've got to tell you, I'm pretty sure the thing, the two things, well maybe three things, the three things I'm looking forward to most in heaven, I bet you can guess one of them, can't you? Stuffed jalapenos, right? The other two things are: just being with Jesus and here's the one I don't know if you've thought about this, I look forward to being able to spend an eternity without messing up again because I'll finally be righteous, completely righteous. That's what he says here.

He says, "Your name will not be blotted out of the book of life." A lot of people get hung up on this. They think, "Oh, right there that teaches you can lose your salvation." No, you've got to remember what happened to the Sardians. He's saying that if you ever became unclean, you got kicked out of the city. If you ever wore the wrong kind of clothes, you got kicked out of the city. If you ever died, you got kicked out of the city. If you ever committed a crime, you got kicked out of the city. What Jesus is saying here is that, "When you overcome, when you follow me, when you're faithful to me," he says, "I'm going to put your name in a book that nobody will ever blot it out. There won't be any way of you ever getting kicked out of the city. It's going to be an impossibility. You're going to be eternally secure," and a lot of people are freaked out about that verse 5 but our names are already in the Lamb's book of life. Let me emphasize something: it does not matter when it comes to heaven if your name is on the church rolls but it very much matters that your name is in the Lamb's book of life. I think he's telling the Sardinian Christians, "Do you know what? A lot of you are going to be surprised on judgment day. You were in the church but your name wasn't on the rolls." Now, most of you know that I don't listen to rock music but I do believe in one kind of rock 'n roll, that is my feet are on the Rock and my name is on the roll. That's my kind of rock 'n roll. Now, I just think that we need to understand how important it is to be in the Lamb's book of life but then were there forever.

Then he says, "I'll confess you before my Father and the angels." He says, "I'm going to verify for all eternity that you are citizens of the kingdom of heaven." Let me ask you now as we close as Richard comes to lead us in song: does this apply to us? You would think, "Oh, no, no. Our church isn't dead." But I want you to be a little more honest with me for a minute and think through some of these questions with me that I ask myself. One is: does it seem like it takes every ounce of energy you have just to get out of bed and come to church on Sundays let alone have the disciplines of reading and praying and fasting and meditating the rest of the week? Then maybe we're going to sleep spiritually.

Are we weak spiritually? Do we do little outside of Sunday to strengthen our spiritual lives? Have we become spoon-fed Christians that rely on a preacher to explain to us what the word of God says rather than opening it for ourselves and finding out every day that God has something to say to you and me. Are we taking that time to spend with him? Are we praying prayers that will move mountains? What about, have we forgotten exactly how precious the cross is and what it did because I was facing eternity apart from God and yet God loved me when I wasn't worth loving and sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross for me. Have we made obedience optional? Is it optional, "Oh yeah, I've got grace. I don't really need to obey all those things in the word." But he says, "He that has my commandments and keeps them, it's him that loves me." Do I really love Christ enough to know the importance? Do we forget to pray? Do we forget to read our Bibles? Do we forget to go to church? Do we forget too fast? Do we forget to meditate? When is the last time we had a good session of getting on our knees and repenting?

By the way, Charles Finney wrote a book on revival. Charles Finney said there was a real simple way to have revival in any church and here's his formula: he says, get a piece of chalk, get on the ground, draw a big circle on the ground with a piece of chalk, get inside the circle and pray for God to revive everyone inside that circle and pray for everyone in that circle to have their souls thoroughly cleaned up by repentance. Then you'll have revival. That's what we need to do. Maybe it's time we draw our chalk circle and get in the circle by ourselves.

What about the thought of Christ's return? Does that inspire you? Or is it just kind of a, "Yeah, eschatology, it's pretty interesting. That's kind of cool." But it barely causes us to yawn. Jesus said we need to be living every day like he was coming back that day. There was an old Negro spiritual during the Civil War and the spiritual basically said, "Until the Massa comes, I'll be hoeing cotton and when the Massa comes, will he find me hoeing cotton?" The point is, the song was that when Jesus comes, will he find me working doing what I'm supposed to do? Will he find me reaping a harvest? Wouldn't it be wonderful that at the exact moment Jesus came back, you were having a conversation with someone telling them how to receive Christ as their Savior? By the way, wouldn't that be awesome and you got right to the point where you said, "And now you need to ask Jesus in your heart," and then the rapture comes and poof you're gone? That would be dramatic, wouldn't it? But wouldn't it be wonderful if when he came he found us working instead of doing something that we're ashamed of.

So let's stand. Richard is going to lead us in a song. I appreciate once again your kind attention and I have to confess to you that when I first looked at this letter to the church at Sardis, I thought, "Oh man, those are some dead people. I'm so glad I'm not like that." But as I began studying it more and more I thought that there are times I kind of go asleep at the wheel spiritually. I kind of cruise on down the road. Sometimes you make it to the other end of the road and you wonder how you got there. I was coming back on Interstate 35 one night a number of years ago. My daughter Harmony and I had somehow or other both contracted whooping cough and I remember how much it hurt me to hear her cough. My cough was so bad that I would cough a single time and I would lose consciousness. I went down and busted my face on the ground several times. I was

driving up Interstate 35 coming back to Dallas and I got right through Waco and I coughed at one end of the bridge and woke up on the other end of the bridge, 70 miles an hour. I am so glad some angel had the wheel of that car while I was unconscious. Do you know what? I wonder sometimes if that's how our Christian life is. We go to sleep for a long time. The thing is that it's really important that we do wake up because the course is only going to hold steady just so long before you bring devastation to your family.

So I'm convicted by this message and if you are, I want to ask you to join me in prayer at the altar. I also just want to invite you that if you've never received Jesus as your Savior, there is not a single thing you could ever do to impress God. You can't keep enough commandments. You can't pay enough money. You can't come to church enough times to make it to heaven. You just have to ask Jesus and say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner. I know I've done bad stuff. I know I'll never be good enough to get to heaven but your Son Jesus died for me."

1 2

Sardis

3 **Revelation 3:1-3a**

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

4 **Revelation 3:3b-4**

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. 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.

5 **Revelation 3:5-6**

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

6 **Sardis, the city**

- City of war
- City of work
- City of wealth
- City of worship
- City of wellness
- City of waning
- City of winks

7 **Sardis: city of war**

- Earliest reference to Sardis is in *The Persians of Aeschylus* (472 BC); in the *Iliad*, it was called Hyde.
- Became the capital of the Maeonians in the 8th century B.C.
- A city of great influence in the Lydian kingdom
- As such it was a target for conquest.

8 **Sardis: city of war (2)**

- Captured by the:
 - Cimmerians in the 7th century BC
 - By the Persians in the 6th
 - By the Athenians in the 5th
 - By Antiochus III the Great at the end of the 3rd century BC.
 - Conquered by Cyrus the Great during the Persian era

9 **Sardis: city of war (3)**

- During the Ionian Revolt, the Athenians burnt down the city.

- Sardis remained under Persian domination until it surrendered to Alexander the Great in 334 BC.

10 **Sardis: city of work**

- Sardis located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, on an important trade route that ran through the kingdom of Lydia.
- Important industries included jewelry, dye, and textiles, which had made the city wealthy.

11 **Sardis: city of wealth**

- Sardis formed the end station for the Persian Royal Road (running east to west) which began in Persepolis, capital of Persia.
- The early Lydian kingdom was very advanced in the industrial arts and Sardis was the chief seat of its manufactures. The most important of these trades was the manufacture and dyeing of delicate woolen stuffs and carpets.

12 **Sardis: city of wealth (2)**

- The stream *Pactolus* which flowed through the market-place "carried golden sands" in early antiquity, which was in reality gold dust out of Mount Tmolus.
- During the reign of King Croesus, metallurgists of Sardis discovered the secret of separating gold from silver, thereby producing both metals of a purity never known previously.

13 **Sardis: city of wealth (3)**

- Golden nuggets had been used for trade but were usually electrum – a combination of gold and silver. So the value was always suspect.
- Sardis could mint nearly pure silver and gold coins and their value was trusted throughout the known world.

14 **Sardis: city of wealth (4)**

- This revolution made Sardis rich and Croesus' name synonymous with wealth itself.
- For this reason, Sardis is famed in history as the place where modern money was invented.

15 **Established money**

1. It must be durable, which is why we don't use wheat or corn or rice.
2. It must be divisible, which is why we don't use art work.
3. It must be convenient, which is why we don't use lead or copper.
4. It must be consistent, which is why we don't use real estate.

16 **Established money (2)**

5. It must possess value in itself, which is why we don't use paper.
 6. It must be limited in the quantity that is available, which is why we don't use aluminum or iron.
 7. It should have a long history of acceptance, which is why we don't use molybdenum or rhodium.
- Only GOLD and SILVER fit all seven characteristics.

17 **U.S. Constitution, Art. 1, Sec 10**

- No State shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation; grant letters of marque and reprisal; coin money; emit bills of credit; make any thing but gold and silver coin a tender in

payment of debts; pass any bill of attainder, ex post facto law, or law impairing the obligation of contracts, or grant any title of nobility.

18 **Sardis: city of worship**

- In Sardis, it was forbidden to approach the temple of Artemis with soiled clothing. Only those who were dressed in white were allowed to approach the deity.

19 **Sardis: city of worship (2)**

- Center of pagan worship and site of a temple of Artemis
 - Roman name: Diana
 - Goddess of the moon, the hunt, childbirth, young girls
- The temple to Artemis was never completed due to earthquake in A.D. 17.

20 **Ruins of the temple of Artemis**

21 **Sardis: city of worship (3)**

- A small village called Sart remains on the site of this once-important city.
- Archeologists have located the ruins of a Christian church in the southeast corner of the temple to Artemis.

22 **Jewish synagogue in Sardis**

23 **Sardis: city of 40 winks**

- Sardis seemed impossible to conquer because of the steep cliffs that afforded it natural protection.
 - In 546 B.C., the Persian king Cyrus laid siege to the city for 14 days with no progress.
 - One day, a shrewd Persian soldier observed a Sardinian soldier descending down a long, winding path on the side of the cliff on the seemingly impenetrable southern edge of city to retrieve his helmet.

24 **Sardis: city of 40 winks (2)**

- In the middle of the night (while Sardis was sleeping), the Persian army followed his path back up the summit and captured the whole city, taking the entire city by surprise.
- It so astounded the Greek world that, "capturing Sardis" became a saying for achieving the impossible! "If you can capture Sardis you can do anything!"

25 **Sardis: city of 40 winks (3)**

- Alexander the Great defeated this city while it was asleep.
- A guard fell asleep at his post. Alexander the Great's men scaled the wall, overtook the sleeping guard, and soon overtook the whole city.
- Sardis fell twice in the night because of the negligence of a few watchmen.

26 **Sardis: city of waning**

- Sardis once had significant fame as a royal city, but now it was nothing. The citizens were living off past fame.
- An earthquake destroyed much of Sardis in A.D. 17. Citizens never totally rebuilt city for fear another earthquake would undo their labors.

27 **Sardis: city of waning (2)**

- The church's loyalty and service to Christ was in the past. Now they were nothing.
 - They had made peace with surrounding society.
 - They even had church meetings in corner of the temple or Artemis.

28 **Sardis: city of witness**

- A book was kept near the city of gate that had a written record of every occupant of the city.
- When a person died, or committed a crime, or was found unworthy, his name was blotted out of the book of the living.
- Corpses were transported to the necropolis, the city of the dead.

29 **Sardis: city of witness (2)**

- Those whose names remained in the book, counted it a joy to hear their names called out and acknowledged when they arrived at city gates.
- So it will be for Christians on the final day of judgment when we hear our names called out and enter into the heavenly city.

30 **Sardis: city of wellness**

- Sardians prided themselves in their physical fitness and health.
- They built health facilities that rivaled any in the world.
 - Roman baths
 - An elaborate gymnasium

31 **Gymnasium of Sardis**

32 **Roman bath at Sardis**

33 **The Christ**

34 **The Christ**

- He holds the seven spirits of God
 - Jesus is in control of the seven spirits of God.
 - The Holy Spirit exists to glorify Christ. Christ in turn glorifies the Father.
- He holds the messengers of the seven churches
 - They are in His hand by His appointment.

35 **Pastor Melito**

- MELITO, bishop of Sardis in the second century, was eminent for piety and learning.
- He visited Palestine to assure himself and his flock as to the Old Testament canon and wrote an epistle on the subject.
- He also wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse

36 **The commendation**

No general commendation; harshest of the 7 letters
Only a little life left in this church

37 **The commendation**

- Christ has nothing good to say about this church in general; it receives His harshest rebuke.
 - Christ acknowledges that the church had a "reputation" of being alive
 - Perhaps other churches looked at the outward signs of life in the church at Sardis and

said, "Wow! That church is really doing something."

- But Jesus quickly points out that this reputation is false. The church – according to Jesus
- is DEAD or just about to die!

38 **Matthew 23:27-38**

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

39 **The commendation (2)**

- There is a remnant who are still faithful
 - This remnant is the church's only sign of remaining life.
 - There are still a few church members who have not allied themselves to the world – who are still walking in purity.
 - These will still walk with Christ as His disciples.

40 **2 Corinthians 7:1**

- *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

41 **The criticism**

"I know your deeds" – used to list their weaknesses

42 **The problem of pride**

- "You pride yourself in being this towering acropolis, this fully alive church. But in reality, you're more like the necropolis, a city of the living dead."

43 **The problem of pride (2)**

- "You pride yourself in your secure position, in your standing as my redeemed, as baptized believers, and as a worshiping community. In reality, you are vulnerable to the enemy. You're letting your guard down. You're asleep. You're weak. You've forgotten history."

44 **The problem of pride (3)**

- "You pride yourself in your ability to die wool, and to fabricate the finest garments in all of Asia Minor. But in reality, you've soiled your clothes. You're unacceptable to me."
- "You pride yourself in being physically fit and going to the gym. But I know your deeds. You have this reputation of being physically alive, but you are spiritually dead."

45 **In a nutshell...**

- The church at Sardis was more of a cemetery than a church.

46 **Satan's Sardin strategy**

- Other churches addressed in Revelation are under attack by Satan:
 - In Ephesus there are false apostles, the Nicolaitans, and hardships.
 - In Smyrna, there are the Jews from the synagogue of Satan, the believers are being falsely imprisoned, and Christ is asking them to remain faithful unto death.

47 **Satan's Sardin strategy (2)**

- In Pergamum we read how a believer named Antipas was put to death and refused to renounce his faith.
- In Thyatira, there is tremendous physical suffering as Satan seduces believers into sexual immorality.

48 **Satan's Sardian strategy (3)**

- But in Sardis? In Sardis, no overt attack is needed by Satan.
 - Just as Alexander the Great and King Cyrus conquered the Sardians while they slept, Satan's strategy was to lull the believers into a deep sleep, to let them feel secure and comfortable in their high place, only to sneak in and destroy them.

49 **Satan's Sardian strategy (4)**

- This is Satan's strategy for the American Church too. It's not to kill and destroy, or persecute, or cause us to suffer. Not yet.
- Satan's strategy is to lull us into a deep sleep, to weaken our resolve, to busy us with commerce, with making wool, dying wool, and fabricating appearances.

50 **Incomplete**

- Just as the temple to Artemis was never completed, Jesus says that the works of the Christians in Sardis have fallen far short of what Christians should be doing.
 - The Christians of Sardis had started many things for God. But their enthusiasm quickly waned and they never finished anything for the Lord.
 - "You have not completed anything that you have done."

51 **The command**

Wake up!
Remember!
Repent!
Keep the Word!
....or else!

52 **Warning: Wake up!**

- "Wake up from being dead"
 - Return to a state of spiritual vigilance
 - Are you spiritually alert? Have you taken an appraisal of your spiritual life lately?
 - Do you see the dangers that lurk to destroy your witness?
- "Live like real Christians again"
- "Give evidence of being alive and fruitful for Christ!"

53 **Strengthen what remains**

- Put some resolve into what little vigor remains
- Restore those Christian activities that are about to die completely in your life
 - Bible reading
 - Prayer
 - Witnessing
 - Fasting
 - Meditating

54 **Remember**

- The Word of God that you heard
- The Word of God that you received

55 **Keep the Word**

- Hold on to what little life you have left and don't let it go.
- Fight for your life!

56 **Repent**

- Do it now – at once
- Aorist imperative with force

57 **Warning: Sudden destruction**

- If you do not maintain watchfulness...
 - Like you failed to do when overcome by Alexander the Great
 - Like you failed to do when overcome by Cyrus
- I will come to destroy your church at a time that you are not expecting it.

58 **Fear God, not Satan**

- Matthew 10:28 -- *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*
- Revelation 1:17-18 -- *Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

59 **Fear God, not Satan (2)**

- Matthew 24:43-44 -- *But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

60 **Fear God, not Satan (3)**

- 1Thessalonians 5:1-3 -- *Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

61 **Fear God, not Satan (4)**

- 2 Peter 3:8-13 -- *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."*

62 **Fear God, not Satan (5)**

- 2 Peter 3:8-13 (continued) -- *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire,*

and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

63 **The promise**

- You shall be clothed in white raiment
 - Qualified to be in God's presence
- Your name will not be blotted out of the book of Life
 - Eternally secure
- Jesus will confess you as His before the Father and the angels
 - Certified citizenship

64 **Does this apply to us?**

65 **Are we Sardinian Christians?**

- Does it take every ounce of energy just to get out of bed for church on Sunday, let alone tend to spiritual nourishment during the week?
- Are we weak? Do we do little outside of Sunday to strengthen our spiritual lives? Are we spoon-fed, Sunday-only Christians who've never learned to truly know Christ's Word, share our faith, or pray prayers that move mountains?

66 **Are we Sardinian Christians? (2)**

- Have we forgotten what Christ has done for us on the cross?
- Do we forget to pray, forget to read our Bibles, forget to go to church, forget to fast, and forget to meditate?
- Have we made obedience optional?
- Is our repentance non-existent?
- Does the thought of Christ's glorious return barely evoke a yawn.?