



# SARDIS

## REVELATION 3:1-6

### **Catching Up on the Story**

In John's description of the revelation he received from God, he has witnessed the heavenly throne room, seen a vision of Jesus surrounded by seven golden lamp-stands holding seven stars with a sword coming out of his mouth. We've been told that the lamp-stands are the seven churches and that the stars are the spirits of the seven churches.

John is then instructed to write to each of the seven churches. That there are seven churches likely indicates that John's communication is not just for those seven individual churches but the church universal. While each church struggles with different things, those struggles are common among those who seek to follow Christ. We also noted that the letters are addressed to the spirits of the churches or the collective vibe of the church.

The church in Ephesus had a spirit of legalism and boundary keeping because they had sought to remain steadfast in their beliefs, but in doing so, they lost their first love, the love of God and neighbor. Meanwhile, the church in Smyrna had a spirit of faithfulness. They refused to participate in the political, religious, and economic idolatry of the day, costing them tremendously. The church in Pergamum suffers from a different problem. Their spirit is a spirit of accommodation to the world around them. They allowed themselves to be convinced that they could participate in the economic, political, and religious idolatry without guilt because the gods those around them worshiped weren't gods at all. They failed to believe that if they remained faithful, God would provide their daily bread. Finally, in Thyatira, the church does excellent work, yet they tolerate false teaching. They've sold out to the powers of this world and having done so, they have significantly damaged their ability to be an accurate representation of Christ in the world.

### **Revelation 3:1-6**

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

"I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember then

what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. <sup>4</sup> Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. (NRSV)

### **Discussion Questions**

Read the text aloud. Then, read the text to yourself quietly. Read it slowly, as if you were very unfamiliar with the story.

1. There seems to be no outside pressure on the church in Sardis from either the culture or from the Romans. This is different from the other letters. How might this fact be significant?
2. Why does Jesus describe himself as the one who “has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars” (3:1)? Go back and reread chapter 1:9-20 for clues.
3. What does Jesus mean by “I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead?”
4. Have you ever known something or someone who looked alive but was dead or near to death? If so, describe your experience.



come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you?" What would Jesus be coming to do?

10. In verse four, Jesus proclaims that there are still a few faithful ones left in the church. What does "not soiled their clothes" mean?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Greco-Roman cities had books that contained records of people's citizenship. If a person committed a crime or disgraced themselves or the city, their name could be blotted out from the citizenship roles. In verse five, is Jesus referring to doing (or not doing) something similar? What do you think he means?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. What do you think Jesus means by, "I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels" (verse 5)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. In what ways are we like the church in Sardis? In what ways are we different from the church in Sardis?

## **So What?**

What's remarkable about the church in Sardis is that there is no mention that they are under any pressure from either the culture at large or the Romans. By all accounts, they were free to worship and serve as they wished. They were comfortable, and perhaps that was the problem. They had it all, so they did not need to remember what God had done for them in the past.

As we have moved through Jesus' letter to the churches, we've asked ourselves if we are different than or similar to each church. Would Jesus be telling us to wake up or to remain watchful?

Here in the US, we are mainly safe. We have been blessed with plenty beyond compare. We eat and sleep without much worry. We are comfortable, and perhaps that's a problem?

The Old Testament is filled with stories of God's people becoming comfortable and subsequently forgetting that they desperately need God. Much of the Old Testament is a cautionary tale about what not to do in our faith. Whenever God's people become apathetic and complacent, they turn away from God, believing that they're more than capable of taking care of themselves. When they do this, they don't outright reject God; they start going through the religious motions while taking care of their own needs, which always leads to their downfall.

If we're watching, if we're awake, the church in Sardis can be a cautionary tale for us. We can ask that God help us be awake and alert, to remember how much God has done in the past and how much we need God now.