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Seven Churches, Seven Lenses, Part 5

The Church at Sardis

Text: Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis:

* Capital of the kingdom of Lydia
* Approximately 30 miles southeast of Thyatira
* Had Croesus as its king. Croesus was extremely wealthy, (recall the saying, “as rich as Croesus”) credited with issuing the first gold and silver coins. Sardis had rich mineral resources during the time of Croesus, with evidence of a gold refinery near the Pactolus stream close to Sardis.
* Today, it is the city of Sart, in the Manisa Province of western Turkey.
* A trade city, known for its wool trade. Some claim that the art of dyeing wool was discovered in Sardis.

**Self-description of Jesus:**

He is the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. There are not seven Spirits of God. This is probably Jesus’ way of proclaiming the perfect Spirit of God that resides in Jesus, seven being the number of perfection or completion. The seven stars are the angels(leaders) of the seven churches (1:20).

Commendation:

1. I know your works. Remember, these letters are from the all-knowing Christ. He, according to 2:23, is the One “who searches minds and hearts”. He knows us...and our works.
2. You have a reputation (name) for being *alive*... (v.1)

You know the type. They live on reputation, trying to keep up the image of what and who people *think* they are. In contemporary culture we call them *posers*. They present a facade, a false cover page to a falsified life resume´. The folks in Sardis were living on their past. They thought they were unbeatable. The city was built on a steep precipice and the city thought itself impregnable. Yet, in 549 B.C. it was captured by Cyrus the Persian and in 218B.C. it was captured by Antiochus. Leon Morris says Sardis was captured “both times because of its slackness” [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary].

Sardis had a reputation for being sharp, distinctive, discerning, prepared and superior. However, all that was in the past. That’s all reputation, what people say of them. The reality is that there is no spiritual life in them.

Jesus addresses this way of living in a stinging rebuke to the Pharisees in Matthew 23: 27-28

***27****“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.* ***28****Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

In Sardis, the outside didn't match the inside.

**Illus:**

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This is what the risen Christ offers to the Church at Sardis- reputation repair. No, Jesus actually offers reputation replacement. These who say “yes” to Jesus receive new lives, built on a new reputation. Sardis saints are living on a reputation of vibrancy but are, in reality, dead! Christ offers us the opportunity to be alive in Him.

**Warning:** We must be diligent and be always growing, lest we have life in name and reputation only.

Jesus is not negating the power of work well-done. He is rebuking a church that does what it does, simply to enhance its reputation.

The late Vance Havner said that there are four movements to a great, spiritual ministry: a man, a movement, a machine and a monument. Sardis had become a monument by the time John writes to them.

**Condemnation:**

1. You are, in actuality, *dead* (v.1).
2. I have not found your works perfect before God (v.2).

**Admonition/action steps**

1. Be watchful, alert. This is an admonition not to be taken lightly. So many believers get less and less engaged the longer they walk with God. We are vigilant at the outset, then slowly allow evil and slothfulness and bitterness and cynicism and mediocrity and hatred to creep in and define us. Remain alert!

Recall with me, 1 Peter 5:8

**8**Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

1. Strengthen the things which remain. Instead of faking, fortify. Spend your time, not in furthering your reputation for being alive, instead, work on that which you possess and make it stronger, more substantive. A blessing/benediction from 1 Peter 5:10:

 *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.*

Jesus, speaking to Peter inLuke 22:32:

*“...But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”*

 It is the will of God that the church, as an organism, be strong and that the individuals who *are* the Church be strong as well.

1. Remember how (and what?) you have received and heard
2. Hold fast (guard, protect) and repent. To repent is to have a change of heart and mind that abandons former dispositions and results in a new self and a new direction.

**Encouragement and Promise** (v.4-5)

1. You still have some faithful people there. The *entire* city has not gone against God. We call this a remnant. There are always a few, unfortunately a minority, who refuse to cave, to bow, to capitulate, to compromise. There are some of those in Sardis. They have not defiled their garments...or themselves (v. 4).

2. I told you that overcomers eat better (2:7; 2:17). Here, in this text, the overcomers dress better (v.4-5a), having traded in the soiled garments of infidelity for the white garment of faithfulness. These faithful are in God’s book. This text does not suggest that a person who is walking with Christ can lose his or her salvation. This reference here is to the book of life, which contains only the names of those who belong to Christ (Revelation 21:27). One commentator has said if it contained the names of all living people, it wouldn’t be called the book of life, for lost sinners are dead (Ephesians 2:1). Those who have confessed Christ as Lord while on earth shall have their names confessed *by* Christ (v. 5) before God and His angels.

**Closing**

Judges 16 recounts the story of Samson asleep in Delilah’s lap. After his strength left him, the tormenting Delilah said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson”. He said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free”. He did not even know that the Lord had departed from him (Judges 16:18-20).

I want us to see our church in Stone Mountain, through the lens of this church at Sardis. If we are not careful, we could be become well-known for our activity: our VBS, our concerts, our retreats, our one-day seminars, our Sunday School classes, our small groups, our Bible studies, our diabetes management classes, our Zumba classes, our global mission engagement. We could be known for movement but be dead in mission. We could ride on our reputation! We could have “progress” but not purpose. We could have all the signs of communal life and be spiritually dead. God help us!!!!

Amen