

## Church of the Living Dead

**Key Verses:** Rev 3:5 ~ " He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

**Power Point:** Just as in the midst of dying fire there are embers still lit, so in the midst of a dying church there are people who still have life and where there is life there is still hope. It only takes a spark to start a forest fire!

1. Rev 3:2-3; Mark 13:35 ~ The church of Sardis was in need of a spiritual awakening. Overconfidence and complacency had led to their being captured.
  - What are some precautions we should take to prevent us from becoming overconfident and complacent in our walk with God?
  
2. Zechariah 4:6; Isaiah 11:2; ~ No man-made church program or structure can ever produce life. It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus brings life and revives His church.
  - Do you feel like lately you've been going through the motions in your service to the Lord? How can we as a church be sure that we are not depending on our good reputation in the community and past experiences to be seen as a prosperous and growing church?
  
3. Revelation 3:4-6 and 2:5 ~ In order to encourage the church to a place of renewal and revival Jesus encourages them to remember how they received and heard the first time.
  - Look back to the moment when you first responded to faith in Christ. Why is it so important to remember where we came from?

**Application:** Have the group members write down things they remember hearing that caused them to repent and come to Christ. Ask for volunteers to share with the group.

# Church of the Living Dead

**Rev 3:1** "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "

**Introduction:** The words to the church of Sardis are pretty strong. Of the seven churches Sardis was among the lowest in Spiritual passion. Its compromise with the culture that surrounded it and its lack of a life in the Spirit, led to what Jesus would describe as being dead.

## Background on Sardis

Sardis was about 30 miles southeast of the city of Thyatira and was one of the oldest cities of Asia Minor. Like its neighbor Thyatira, Sardis was prosperous because of its trade and economic stronghold of the wool industry.

Although much of the city was built on the valley floor below, the Acropolis or upper city of Sardis stood 1500 feet above the plain on a ridge of Mount Tmolus. The sides of the upper city were steep and only by a path along a narrow ridge could one reach the top.

As you can imagine, this gave the city an almost impenetrable stronghold. Its steep walls and almost unconquerable position led the people of Sardis to be overconfident and because of a failure to watch and be on alert the city was captured on two occasions in the middle of the night. In 549 B.C. by Cyrus the Persian by following a secret path up a cliff and in 218 B.C by Antiochus in about the same way.

## The picture of Christ and his admonition

### Rev 3:1

The number “**seven**” is the number for perfection or fullness. This does not mean that there are seven Holy Spirits. The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one Spirit of God. (Eph 4:4) “**The seven Spirits of God**” signifies the fullness of the Holy Spirit sent to the seven churches. (Rev 4:5; 5:6; Isaiah 11:2; Zechariah 4:2, 10;)

It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus brings life and revives His church and the church of Sardis was in need of a spiritual awaking.

No man-made church program can ever produce life. The Church was born by the Spirit and its life comes from a continual infilling and empowerment of the Spirit.

The word of the Lord to Zachariah still rings true today: “It’s not by power nor by might but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts.” (Zach 4:6)

Sardis may have had a great reputation because of its works in the community but it was spiritually dead in the eyes of God. What they were building was an organizational structure that was void of the life of the Spirit.

**Application:** They were like many churches today that have a reputation for good social programs, from feeding the poor, boys and girls clubs to recovery homes, which are commendable and important yet they are spiritually dead.

Once a church has a good reputation in a community it's possible for it to do things in a mechanical way and lose the true motive for which it was called. If we aren't careful we can lose sight of doing things to serve and please God to looking good in a community.

**The commendation** – there is no commendation or praise for this church, nor a correction because of bad doctrine, nor mention of persecution or conflict. This was a church that was banking on its past success and was inattentive of its present spiritual decline.

**Application:** you and I need to stay current in our relationship with God and not bank on past experiences. **Take a look at your spiritual condition and ask yourself, "have I become mechanical in my service to the Lord going through the motions or am I truly walking with him?"**

When an organism is alive there is growth, multiplication and power and when these things are missing from a church or a believer's life then they are either dying or already dead.

### **The call to repent and change**

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Jesus exhorts the church of Sardis to:

#### **1. Be watchful – "to keep awake, to be vigilant"**

Sardis a stronghold city was conquered twice in the middle of the night. Why, because of the complacency and overconfidence of the guards who instead of watching fell asleep.

It's when church members and leaders get used to being blessed and become complacent in their ministry that the enemy finds opportunity to work. Jesus expects us to be alert and occupied in kingdom expansion when he returns, not asleep in our ministry.

**Mar 13:35** Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

**Application: The first step** to a spiritual awakening is a confession that one has fallen asleep. **The second step** is to stay vigilant when it comes to our prayer life, devotion to the word, fellowship in community and service with the right motive.

We need to ask ourselves questions such as:

"How is my spiritual condition? Have I been so distracted with many things that I've become complacent and lethargic? Am I busy with so many things that I've fallen asleep when it comes to spiritual awareness?"

**Biblical Illustration on watching:** *Jesus and the three disciples pray*

**Mat 26:38-41** *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." 39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." 40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Jesus came and found them sleeping instead of being vigilant in prayer with him. He knew that the hour of temptation was near and if they weren't on their prayer post they would succumb to fear and temptation. So he is saying be spiritually vigilant or awake.

In Revelations 3:3 when he says he will come as a thief in the night he is not saying he is a thief he is using this picture to say he will come when we least expect him.

In other words he will come and will hold us accountable to the post we were assigned. *The last thing a guard wanted was to be caught sleeping on the job.*

## **2. Strengthen what remains “to make stable”**

4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

Just as in the midst of dying fire there are embers still lit so in the middle of a dying church there were people who still had life and where there is life there is still hope.

There were those who had not compromised with the culture and pressures of their world who still were devoted and committed to Christ.

**Application:** We need to keep growing and getting stronger in our walk with Him. Don't let things decay spiritually! Grow in prayer, grow in the knowledge of the word, grow in community involvement and service, grow in your passion for God!

## **3. Remember (call to mind) how you received and heard “**

3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

In order to encourage the church to a place of renewal and revival Jesus encourages them to remember how they received and heard the first time.

This is what he told Ephesus “Remember therefore from where you have fallen...” (Rev 2:5a)

Look back to the moment when you first responded to the faith.

### ***Second generation believers listen to me:***

The gospel was brought to Sardis somewhere in the mid-fifties and John wrote Revelation in the mid-nineties this means that approximately forty years had passed. The first-generation Christians had put their faith to work, but the second generation just rested on what had happened in the past. The first generation received the message of salvation, heard it, and obediently followed its instructions (Rev 2:5). The second generation still had the gospel message, but now they are told to know, follow, and obey it.

Young people don't compromise with the culture and become complacent with in your faith and walk with God!

### **The promise**

5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

**Conclusion:** The Spirit of God is the life giver and wants to renew that which is dying in us. He is the life giver, but we are responsible to be watchful, establish and strengthen that which is weak and remember what we have received and heard. Evaluate where you are at spiritually and set you heart to go deeper with God by drawing nearer in prayer, the word and service with the right heart and motive.