



## **Sardis—Get Real! Revelation 3:1-6**

### **Sardis—a city that lived in its rear view mirror**

Sardis is the classic tale of a city whose pride came before their fall, whose trust was placed in the uncertainty of the wealth, and whose lack of vigilance left their impenetrable defenses in ruins. Here are some bullet points about this ancient city.

- Sardis was once the capital of the famed Lydian Kingdom, whose last monarch was King Croesus (KREE-SUS). Just before its fall in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Sardis was a feared city in the ancient world. Croesus was the first king in history to mint gold and silver coins. He became phenomenally affluent; the phrase “as rich as Croesus” was an idiom for great wealth!
- Sardis was located at the precipice of a 1500 foot acropolis, which made it an impregnable fortress against enemies. Croesus was so powerful that he thought to attack Cyrus of Persia. After an initial battle, he returned to Sardis for the winter, expecting Cyrus to return home. Cyrus, however, pursued Croesus and surprisingly destroyed his vaunted cavalry. Croesus then went into his fortress and prepared for siege. But one of Cyrus’s troops climbed up the crevice of the “unscalable” cliff at an unobserved point and opened the gates. Sardis fell after only 14 days of the siege in 546 BC. It so astounded the Greek world that “capturing Sardis” became a saying for achieving the impossible. (Osborne)
- Near the city were hundreds of cave tombs of prominent Sardians; the people of Sardis were interested in death and immortality.
- By the time of the Roman Empire, the glory of political Sardis was long gone. Its commercial interests were its wool industry, claiming to have discovered the process for dyeing wool.
- Harvard University led an archeological project called “The Sardis Expedition.” (Google that phrase for a fascinating look at this ancient city!) You’ll see reconstructions of a fabulous gymnasium, a synagogue (there was a large Jewish presence in Sardis), and remnants of the Temple to Artemis.
- The Hebrew population seemed to have gotten along well with the pagan Romans; something which the Christians followed suit.

This is what brought such scathing words from Jesus.

## Jesus' Words to the church at Sardis: "I see dead people."

v. 1—"I know your deeds" Normally this phrase meant that Jesus was about to compliment the church on what pleased him. Here, though, the only "deeds" that Jesus recognized was the deed of deceptively giving the impression that they were something that, in fact, they were not!

v. 1—"You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead." This church had curb appeal. It was busy with activities but had lost their distinction. The city had so assimilated the church that it was hard to tell the difference between the two.

v. 2—"I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God." An interesting parallel is that the Temple of Artemis was an unfinished construction project; Jesus declared that this church is like that temple—uncompleted and of no value. (Osborne)

v. 3—"If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know what time I will come to you." This should remind the church at Sardis of Cyrus' stealthy mission, which ultimately caused the fall of Croesus and the Lydian Empire. It doesn't take an army to destroy an army. It just takes one thief—that is, one sneaky soldier—to bring down an empire. The sad thing is that this happened *twice* in Sardis' history!

v. 4—"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not [defiled] their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy." The minority are worthy because they are walking with Christ, who has robed them in righteousness; garments finer than any woolen clothing manufactured in Sardis. Jesus wants this minority to act as missionaries to the rest in this church! When a church needs missionaries, that's not good!

v. 5—"I will never blot his name out of the book of life." The overcomers are secure. Like the citizen registry which confirmed one's legal status before the government; the "book of life" is an image reminding those victorious in Christ that no matter what happens to them in this world, He will profess them before His Father and the angels in the next! In other words, don't forfeit the eternal recognition Christ promises for 15 minutes of compromise in the here and now.

## Jesus' word to us: WAKE UP!

What does it mean to be spiritually dead or asleep? It means that you are leaning on your reputation more than reality. It means that the appearance of knowing Christ becomes more important than actually knowing Christ. It means that something else in your life is more real than Jesus. And Jesus says that this is what causes *spiritual narcolepsy*. When you are asleep and you dream, it feels real. You can't tell the difference between the dream world and the real world. For example, why do Christians worry? (For that matter, why do Christian *pastors* worry?) Worry means that something else is more real than Jesus. Wake up! Or, some say, "I know Jesus loves and forgive me; but that doesn't help." Doesn't help?! Are you saying that your sins are more real than Jesus' death for your sins? Wake up!

Here's how you wake up: first of all, assume that you will fall asleep! Christians who know how prone they are to fall asleep are Christians who stay awake! Likewise, Christians who say, "I'm losing my first love" are those who keep their first love. Secondly, the sevenfold Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is our alarm! The Spirit of Christ is the only one who can breathe life into a formaldehyde filled church. Listen to Him! Follow Him! Let Him lead! How do you do that? Hint: Have you read your Bible today? Reading the Bible is one way we listen to the Spirit's voice!