

Wake Up!

Synopsis: Complacency leads to spiritual decline, but there is always a remnant that must wake up!
Intro: we're back in our normal series because it is so timely for season.

Revelation 3:1-6 (ESV)

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. 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.'

The story of Sardis (told by Johnson, 82-83)

Sardis had a golden past that ended tragically. Their gold reserves were deep, extending back to King Midas of Phrygia, who, as the story went, 'rid himself of the Golden Touch by washing it off in the springs of Pactolus,' a stream near Sardis that had gold dust in its silt.¹ In addition, they also had a fortress so impregnable by sheer cliffs on three of its sides, that during a siege by Persia, they neglected to set up a guard in those areas. But fourteen days later, a few Persian soldiers climbed the cliffs, and the city fell to King Cyrus rather quickly.²

Ancient commentators blamed Sardis' tragic fall on "a lack of vigilance." Though the story--600 years prior³--was well known, the *church* in Sardis had not heeded the lessons of it's past.⁴

Reputation isn't everything

I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive... (Revelation 3:1c)

What is the church's reputation? Yours?

Here's the good: known for preaching, worship. Those who are connected have deep relationships.

And many people who come here over the years have reported that it is "alive." And I think they're right!

Drift often accompanies assumption.

The problem is internal

...but you are dead. (Revelation 3:2a)

Dead spirituality⁵ → spiritual lethargy

Notice that there was no external *danger* facing Sardis Christians. No Jezebel, no Balaam, no Nicolaitans, intimidation, rejection, or persecution. Only a good reputation. THAT was the danger!

I tend to wake up when there is a challenge, and glaze over when things are mechanical.

When life gets lovely, the church gets lethargic. Of course....it is NOT lovely right now. And that is bringing to light some traps...

¹ Hemer, *Letters*, 130-131, quoted in Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*. (2001). 82

² Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb*. 83

³ N.T. Wright. *Revelation For Everyone*. (2011). 29

⁴ Dennis E. Johnson. 83

⁵ Beale notes that "the readers have become lethargic about the radical demands of their faith in the midst of a pagan culture."

G.K. Beale. *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*. (Eerdmans, 2015). 78

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TRAPS

The Nostalgia Trap

I know your works. (Revelation 3:1c)

We can depend on past successes, rather than a new move of God's Spirit. It used to be so good, etc.

You contend more for the past than you do for the future.

Instead, we must see the opportunity in the obstacles. What can God DO in all of this?

It's hard to see opportunity if you're a pessimist.

Here's a way to exercise that dormant muscle: #pocketsofjoy

The Highlight Trap

You have the reputation of being alive (Revelation 3:1d)

All of our best is highlighted and it's easy to avoid our weakest spots.

The synagogue there was roughly the length of a football field, one of the largest in antiquity.⁶

We, too, live in an era of the megachurch: where it can seem, from our IG feeds, like the church in America is doing great--after all, buildings are packed.

#highlightReel is not REAL!

Covid-19 has and will shake these traps loose. How?

1. We are being forced to see the future
2. Our normal platforms of success are unusable (buildings, etc)

Pandemic is shaking up the secularism in and out of the church and forcing us all to reckon with what is underneath the surface. What's underneath our society's surface? Anxiety.

Five characteristics of chronically anxious societies⁷

1. Reactivity — the vicious cycle of intense reactions between people
2. Herding — the desire for togetherness forces everyone to adapt to the least mature members in the group
3. Blame displacement — pointing the finger rather than taking personal responsibility
4. A quick-fix mentality — a low threshold for discomfort that constantly seeks relief of symptoms rather than fundamental change
5. Lack of well-differentiated leaders — a failure of nerve that stems from and contributes to the above four

The world is getting brought to its knees. We need a powerful move of God's Spirit.

We need an awakening

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. **3 Remember, then, what you received and heard.** Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. **4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments**, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments**, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. (Revelation 3:2-5)

Historically, fresh movement's of God's Spirit have been felt during some of the most tumultuous times.

If you track the Renewals throughout history, they always seem to be on the cusp of something terrible, and inevitably involve a church that got so desperate for a move of God that they cried out for it, and rearranged their life to make room for it. These are three things JESUS is calling us to cultivate...

1. Spiritual Awareness

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die (Revelation 3:2a)

Don't waste this cultural moment!

- We need to be struck by how much we need God

⁶ Craig S. Keener. *Revelation*. (TNIVC; 2000) 143

⁷ Edwin Friedman. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. (Church Publishing, 1999). 60
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2. Spiritual Inventory

Wake up, and **strengthen what remains and is about to die** (Revelation 3:2a)

IOW, there is very little remaining in the Christians at Sardis. But if there is a glimmer...Jesus is saying, take advantage of it! For some of you, you've been distant for God for years. Covid19 is *just now* getting you to ask deep questions about life, purpose, God. Pay attention to this! Those are the whisperings of the Spirit in a life in which you've largely shut him off, and you may only be hanging on by a thread. Don't let it die!

- Ask yourself the hard questions RIGHT NOW: *How will you respond with Jesus?*

What is needed in this moment of anxiety is an AWAKENING in the body of Christ, fueled by aloneness with God.⁸

There always will be people who want more.

Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. (Revelation 3:4)

Are you among them?

3. Spiritual Practice

Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. (Revelation 3:3a)

Scripture, community, disciplines, etc.

I want to give you another small practice to unify us together as a church.

Our news feeds are flooded with bleak and disruptive news. Some of it is important. But if we don't counteract the constant stream of negativity, our souls will begin to take on that shape. Without our weekly gathering which is needed to recalibrate and redirect our hearts, we must use the next best thing to flip the script: the internet.

Practice: Begin finding daily #pocketsofjoy

Post it on IG feed or story, and use the hashtag so we can find them.

If you don't have instagram, journal it.

As your mind is reminded of the goodness of God, let your heart be shaped as you press into Him.

PRAY for these three things together

1. Spiritual renewal in us and our church
2. Spiritual growth in us and our church
3. Reminders of God's goodness to shape our hearts

⁸ Mark Sayers. *Disappearing Church: The Hope For Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture*. (Moody, 2019). 74-76
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