



Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis – Sinful Slumber

SERMON - 7 June - Greg Holmes

Introduction

Welcome to Church. I am Greg Holmes a regular member of the 6pm congregation here at Kiama Anglican Churches.

Over the last several weeks we have been looking at the first two chapters of Revelation and the letters to the seven churches in Asia.

Today we move into Chapter 3 of Revelation and a little further around the circuit. Today we come to the city of Sardis.



The Letter, commanded and dictated by Christ in Chapter One, has been (assuming the order is as much an itinerary as it is a literary device) to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira in turn.

And now it has (all 21 chapters remember) arrived at Sardis.

Situated at the junction of five roads and commanding the valley below, Sardis was an active commercial city and very wealthy. The city's easy wealth seems to have made for slackness. It was captured by Cyrus the Persian (549 BC) and by Antiochus (218

BC), both times because of its slackness. The city was built on a hill so steep that its defences seemed impregnable. On both occasions enemy troops scaled the precipice by night and found that the overconfident Sardians had set no guard.

So now ... I want you to imagine that you have come into a church meeting (remember those – everyone together getting to their place – chatting to those beside ... eager for what is about to happen)...

Let's get inside the head of one of the members of this church. Here in this house church there is a real buzz; you arrive a little late – a bit of other business to attend to – you have to stand up the back...

Your mate next to you says there is a special letter from John the apostle, the one from Ephesus, the one the Romans have exiled to Patmos – our Elders are going to read it out. Shh – he is starting...

1:12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.

Well that bit about the lampstands and Jesus is full of interesting *pictures and symbols, isn't it?* – Wow there are letters to all those churches around. - He is going to read them all!

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

Ephesus – great place, they sound like goody goodies but lost their first love – need to repent – well, they can be a bit stuck up!

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

Smyrna – met one of them once – Yeah, *it's* been tough for them *but they can't be that good... really.*

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

Now Pergamum – that is more like it – they really have gone downhill – *some of what they get up to ...*

To the angel of the church in Thyatira

And Thyatira – they are much the same – they really need to get *their act together ...*

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

Now US – *Now we’ve got it right –*

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Yes, seven spirits, *seven stars that’s for us...*

I know your deeds;

He knows and likes us...

you have a reputation of being alive,

YEP, respected everywhere, a wonderful church...

but you are dead.

What !!!!! ...

² Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die –

Well I never!

Body

1.

These are the words of him who holds

the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

The brothers and sisters of Sardis (including our ‘thoughtful’ friend) are being addressed through this letter by the one who represents the Holy Spirit and holds the fate of the churches in his hands – for salvation, correction and judgement.

I know your deeds;

you have a reputation of being alive,

but you are dead.

This one, this Jesus, knows this church

– knows they have a reputation for life.

YET they are in fact **DEAD**.

Not alive as supposed – a veneer of life but no depth.

“*Sardis enjoyed* a good reputation but it did not **deserve** this *reputation.*”

Dead ... But not yet buried.

What matters is not impressive rhetoric or a glossy image but *authentic service in God's sight.*”

² Wake up!

They can still be revived.

Be Watchful – continually (from the tense of the verb here) ongoing, no resting on your laurels as the Sardisians had been. (We can't call them the Sardines, can we?)

Strengthen what remains and is about to die,

Dead, it seems meant 'on their deathbed'.

So they are to look at what wilted laurels they have and build on them – look forward – spurn 'death' and grasp for 'life'

**for I have not found your deeds complete
in the sight of my God.**

There is the hint here of getting started but not going forward.

The Ephesians had got started, gone on built a solid church but then lost what got them going – their 'first love'.

The Sardisians had got started, gone on a bit and, it seems, stagnated.

(Caird). This church may have pleased men but it did not please God. Nothing it did was “*complete in the sight of my God*”; its works were not brought to fulfilment.

Why did both Jews and Romans leave this church undisturbed (unlike some of its neighbours)? The answer may well be its lack of *aggressive and positive Christianity*. 'Content with mediocrity, lacking both the enthusiasm to entertain a heresy and the depth of conviction which provokes intolerance, it was too innocuous to be worth persecuting.'

³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard;

obey it, and repent.

The cure for this deathly disease is three-fold:

Remember ... what you have seen and heard

Remember, which is also what the Ephesians were told to do. Means thinking back to the gospel they originally responded to and the teaching they had then and subsequently.

The Basics

Remember Repent (v3). Can you remember those early days of enthusiasm for the things of God, for the Church, for prayer and the Bible? Let the memory trigger you into turning around in repentance. It means a *U-turn*."

Obey

Having remembered they then need to put it into practice as Ephesians (which was possibly a circular letter and the Sardisians may well have been aware of it) puts it - Ephesians 2:8-10 **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

Repent

Turn around, Go Back – you are going the wrong way. The act of obeying is the act of repentance. It is not just saying sorry – it is going forward, doing what Jesus demands of us.

But if you do not wake up,

I will come like a thief,

and you will not know

at what time I will come to you.

The consequences for remaining asleep (good as dead) is to be found wanting at the coming of Jesus in judgement.

This is not a reference to the second coming, which will take place whether the Sardisians are watchful or not. But Christ

comes in many ways and this is clearly a limited coming in judgment on unrepentant sinners. Their fate is none the less *fearsome because left undefined.*”

Yet you have a few people in Sardis

who have not soiled their clothes.

**They will walk with me, dressed in white,
for they are worthy.**

Those who have gone on who have ongoingly remembered, obeyed and repented...

They remain untainted by this ‘near death’...

Dressed in white now they will walk with Jesus in radiant clothes like his.

⁵ He who overcomes will, like them,

And for others in Sardis – the living dead of Sardis – if they overcome – if they remember, obey and repent they too will ...

be dressed in white.

The garment of final righteousness and glory and identification with Jesus:

I will never blot out his name from the book of life,

They will remain in the ‘Book of Life’ written in God’s book ...

but will acknowledge his name

before my Father and his angels.

Jesus will speak of them, publicly, before God and his angels.

⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear

And we all have them

We need to have open ears – not nearly dead ones.

what the Spirit says to the churches.

The plural in the last verse here says -

This is for YOU - for Kiama Anglican Churches – for all of us who view this.

Conclusion

The Spirit, this morning, or day, or evening or whenever you hear this, is speaking out of this 3rd Chapter of Revelation to US.

We need to hear the warning.

Not find excuses.

All talk but no walk.

Remember from our Matthew studies the warning in the little parable about the demons and the empty house (Matthew 12:43-45.) Those at Sardis had what looked like a 'clean house' but ...

Are we DEAD?

I think, suspect, not!

But there is a road to that state from here.

You can move, as this little letter proves, from life to spiritual death.

G.B. Caird calls the church "the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity..." *Is your Christianity inoffensive? If so, Jesus says to you, "Wake up!"*

So:

We are to take the medicine.

Remember

We have been well taught in this place for many, many years and decades...

How do we remember?

We do this by studying our Bibles, hearing (looking at, listening to) sermons, attending Growth Groups or Bible Studies, reading and discussion.

I believe this is so important, particularly now, when we cannot have that weekly meeting together – it is easy to be lazy, or just lackadaisical, about Christian things – there are enough other things to worry about.

To us is the message:

WAKE UP!

Obey

Put what you know into practise.

Don't let the world conform you to its ways.

Be transformed to be like Jesus.

Romans 12:1,2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

And Repent!

Where you fail, Repent!

God is a God of forgiveness; that is the whole point of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; seek God's forgiveness, turn from sin and follow Jesus.

Trust and Obey, Trust and Obey

For there is no other way

To be happy in Jesus,

But to Trust and Obey.

