

# Jesus and His Churches: Sardis

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(Revelation 3:1-6)

## I. Introduction

- A. Dumas opens *Three Musketeers* with D'Artagnan meeting his three friends
  - 1. Actually, he accidentally insults all three and is challenged by each to a duel
    - a. He bumps Athos' injured shoulder and embarrasses Aramis over a lady.
    - b. Then he gets all tangled up in Porthos' cape and exposes his little secret
      - 1) Porthos was dressed to impress in impressive gold-embroidered suit
      - 2) The embroidery was only on the front; it was drab plain on the back
      - 3) Porthos couldn't afford the whole suit— which he covered in cape
  - 2. Porthos impressed his friends until D'Artagnan accidentally exposes him
- B. Can we be a little like Porthos and his half-suit trying to impress others?
  - 1. Have you ever gotten an emails offering to sell you replica Rolex for \$80
    - a. Why? Who really wants to spend \$4000 or more on a wrist watch?
    - b. But there are many a Porthos who wants others to think that they have!
    - c. Many are mortgaged-to-the-hilt but want people think they are wealthy
  - 2. There are many who approach their marriages like Porthos as well
    - a. How often do we hear of marriages breaking up without any warning?
    - b. That seldom is true; Neil Sedaka reminds us, “*Breaking-up is hard to do*”
      - 1) Too often we maintain the appearance of happiness when in trouble
      - 2) Sometimes we spend more energies maintaining than getting help
- C. Jesus warns us against becoming a spiritual Porthos— the Pharisees ([Matt 6:1](#))
  - 1. These guys wanted the reputation of holiness gained through external acts
    - a. Jesus mentions three acts of righteousness—giving, prayer and fasting
    - b. They did all of these, but their purpose was to be seen ([Matt 23:4-7](#))
  - 2. How could they be so spiritually shallow to fake religiosity like that?
    - a. **Problem:** They likely didn't realize that this is what they were doing!
      - 1) They thought the essence of religion was this external stuff
      - 2) So that's what they focused on! They didn't know that God did not!
    - b. We can so focus on externals that we don't realize that's what we do!

## II. Jesus and His Church: Dead or Alive? (Revelation 3:1-6)

- A. That brings us back to our look at the 7 churches of Asia—the church at Sardis
  - 1. The city of Sardis represents the problem experienced by the church
    - a. Sardis had been the capital of ancient Lydia, ruled by King Croesus
      - 1) Under Croesus, Sardis was legendary for its opulence and wealth
      - 2) According to Herodotus, this is where gold/silver coins are first used
    - b. We have the expression, “*Richer than Croesus.*” Reputation of Sardis
  - 2. The reality of Sardis in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was not as opulent nor successful
    - a. Sardis first fell to Cyrus and then later to Alexander the Great.
    - b. It was totally destroyed by earthquake in AD 17 and rebuilt by Tiberius.
      - 1) Though rebuilt, Sardis never really became a very important city.
      - 2) So Sardis had this great reputation, but never really lived up to it.
- B. That is what Jesus says about the church at Sardis (**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Rev 3:1-3**)
  - 1. Church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead.
    - a. *Reputation with whom?* A good reputation was with other churches?
      - 1) They had some good programs going; people heard good things.
      - 2) People who visited could see on a lot of activity within the church.
      - 3) There’s no mention of false teachers or paganism like other churches
    - b. Maybe that good reputation was within the city of Sardis itself.
      - 1) Something else not mentioned is persecution by the pagan world.
      - 2) That was going on at faithful churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia.
      - 3) Church fits in with Sardis; they had a good reputation with pagans.
  - 2. Is it a bad thing to have a lot of programs or a good reputation with city?
    - a. Jerusalem church had “*the favor of all the people*” (**Acts 2:47**) Good!
    - b. The problem at Sardis was that **reality** didn’t match their **reputation**.
      - 1) They were like Porthos new suit—looked good from one angle
      - 2) Jesus, “*I know your works!*” He saw all angles, outside and inside.
  - 3. Sometimes what looks like life is really rigor mortis setting in.
    - a. What looks like growth is really the bloating of a dead corpse.
    - b. That’s what Jesus says about Sardis— reality doesn’t match reputation.

### III. Jesus and His Church: Jesus' Two Messages

#### A. First Message: "Wake up and strength what remains" ([Rev 3:2](#))

1. The situation at Sardis is critical; Jesus says they are "about to die" ([3:2](#))
  - a. They don't need more meetings or more program—they need to wake up
  - b. Jesus warns "If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief" ([3:3](#))
    - 1) That is clearly apocalyptic, end-of-time, Day of Judgment language
    - 2) Same to Ephesus, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand" ([2:5](#))
2. Before the situation can get better, they have to wake up to the situation
  - a. John Stott suggests that the struggle at Sardis is really **two-fold problem**
    - 1) **Nominal Christianity**: Some simply go through motions of faith
    - 2) **Hypocrisy**: Some are seeking to act holy while being decidedly not
  - b. The problem with both of these is they are so hard to see in ourselves
    - 1) We can spot hypocrisy a mile off in other people—or think we can
    - 2) But Christ's command here is for us to look at ourselves ([Rev 3:2](#))
  - c. First step, like **Prodigal Son**, is to come to our senses ([Lk 15:17](#))
3. Julia Denton sent me the lyrics to Bob Dylan's *When You Gonna Wake Up*
  - a. The songs title and message comes from our text in Revelation 3
  - b. Dylan points to the ills of our culture and in our churches—

*You got innocent men in jail, your insane asylums are filled,  
You got unrighteous doctors dealing drugs that'll never cure your ills.  
You got men who can't hold their peace and women who can't control their tongues.  
The rich seduce the poor and the old are seduced by the young.  
Adulterers in churches and pornography in the schools,  
You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules.*
  - c. After each line he repeats a chorus, Jesus' chorus to Sardis in Rev 3—

*When you gonna wake up, when you gonna wake up and strengthen the things that remain?*
  - d. We can protest some of same societal ills that Dylan writes about here
    - 1) But Jesus' words aren't directed at the culture but to the church
    - 2) Dylan's song ends where the gospel really begins— at the cross

*There's a Man on a cross and He's been crucified for you.  
Believe in His power – that's about all you've got to do.*
  - e. All we have to do is believe? Yes, but must do that with eyes wide open
4. We have to wake and remember; wake up and strengthen what remains.

B. **Second Message:** A word for those already awake (2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: **Rev 3:4-6**)

1. This dead-as-a-doornail church has some who still walked with Christ.
  - a. They must have felt lonely, living branches among the dead wood
  - b. Faithful disciples were worshipping and working with a dead church
2. Jesus could have told the faithful to do what so many do today.
  - a. He could have insisted they find another church, one already faithful.
  - b. He could have said to start a new church; rather easy with house church!
  - c. He could have said use manipulation and politics to fire preacher/elders!
3. What does Jesus tell the faithful in a dead church! *Remain faithful!*
  - a. If your church is wrong, you can be right— that’s what Jesus says here.
  - b. Faithfulness only demands that we remain faithful—not find new church
  - c. If all the faithful would have left, so would have all hope for revival!

C. While we are a community of faith, God judges our faithfulness individually.

1. Sardis (like Thyatira) received stern warnings— there was **grave danger**.
  - a. But like Thyatira, Jesus points to faithful Christian Sardis!
  - b. Jesus told the faithful at Thyatira, “*Only hold on to what you have*” (**2:25**)
  - c. Faithful at Sardis, “*will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy*”
2. There are two hopes for this dying church on life support at Sardis
  - a. **Revival:** Those asleep could wake up and strengthen what remains
    - 1) People could change; there was hope for this church after all
    - 2) Yes, this was a dead church, but it served a Lord who raises the dead
  - b. **Remains:** The faithful believers who refused to give up and give in
    - 1) The reason why the faithful were to remain—God needed them
    - 2) God could rebuild and renew... and He’d start with His faithful ones!

## IV. Conclusion

A. The obvious question we will end with is this one—so which one are you

1. Are you asleep? Going thru motions? Play church? *Wake up & strengthen!*
2. Are you faithful to the living Christ? *Let him work thru you... and on us*

B. “*He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to His churches.*”