

## Session 5

July 4, 2021

### VIGILANT AGAINST COMPLACENCY

#### Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis was a fabled and fabulous city, renowned in the ancient world for its wealth. In fact, many historians believe the very first coins minted were minted from the gold of Sardis. As well, the city lay at the western end of a highway leading east into Persia. Thus, it was a trade route for all kinds of merchandise traveling in and out of Persia. Interestingly, the city was built on the side of a cliff making them incredibly secure...or so they thought. Twice the city was invaded and sacked, before an earthquake shook it loose around 17 AD.

Sardis was also known for its hot mineral springs which were said to have the power to reverse pending death. It's a shame the church could not take advantage of those hot springs...they sure needed them, because Jesus said the church at Sardis was dead!

**A dead church (v. 1).** I remember the time lightning struck an oak tree in the yard where I grew up. When a forestry man came by to examine it, he said, "Even though the branches and leaves may continue for a few more years, the tree is dead. It just doesn't know it yet." And so it was with the church at Sardis.

Other than the sad account given in these 6 verses, we know nothing more about the church. There is no mention of strife, persecution, heresy, or hypocrisy. But something went terribly wrong in Sardis. Although they gave everyone the impression they were alive and well, like that oak tree in my yard growing up, they were dead. They just didn't know it yet! For reflection: *Through the years, I have heard many believers complain that their church is dead. What do we normally mean when we say that? Why do you think so many churches today lack vitality?*

**A doomed church (vv. 2-3).** Interestingly, while the church as a whole was dead, there were some believers there who still stood pure before God (v. 4). And what's even more surprising, is that God wasn't done yet with the church! Their works were not "complete before God." But unless they corrected their course—and did so quickly—they were doomed. God's solution had three steps. First, they needed to *remember* what they received and heard. The verb tense indicates that the value of the gospel they received initially was still continuing among them and still accessible to them. Second, they were warned to *keep it*. The idea is to grasp it and hold on to it. Third, they were commanded (as always), to *repent*. In their case, it was not so much what they *did* that zapped their spiritual vitality, but rather what they *didn't do*. The warning in verse 3 is dramatic. Unless they were vigilant in their spiritual duties, the Lord would visit them...but not in a good way! For reflection: *Where else does the "thief in the night" motif appear in Scripture? What connotations are associated with that simile? Is it a good thing...or a bad thing?*

**A divided church (vv. 4-6).** Like every congregation, the church at Sardis had some dedicated believers; those who had *not stained* their clothing. Like Thyatira, Sardis had a booming garment industry. In fact, they were the first to dye wool for garments, so they would have understood the analogy of being stained very well. Because they kept their earthly garments clean, they would be given a garment of pure white by Christ and would walk securely with Him. For reflection:

*What does Christ's promise to the clean mean for us today? Is it possible to live a life committed to Christ personally, and still be a part of a dead church? What can the pure members do to help bring the vitality back?*