

sardis

BY DAVE FIELDS

LETTERS FROM JESUS: SARDIS

Hearing these Letters Today

Jesus addresses the specific areas each specific church needs to consider. And yet, every single letter ends with this same phrase from Jesus: “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:6)

Note: “churches” is *plural*. Note too: “says” is *present tense*.

Which means: this is addressed not only to that community in Sardis, but to every single Christian community - in their own time; in our own time.

Every believing community has to ask: “Holy Spirit – right in our moment – what are you saying to us? Give us ‘ears’ to hear and ‘hearts’ to discern in what ways, and to what extent are, the *critiques* and *encouragements* and *warnings* we need to hear in this moment.”

The City of Sardis

Sardis had been a booming place. In the sixth century BC, Sardis was one of the most powerful cities of the ancient world. Yet, as scholar William Ramsey said, By the Roman period Sardis “...lived rather on its ancient prestige than on its suitability to present conditions.”

The Church in Sardis

“Apparently untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition, it had so come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was spiritually dead....[T]he church at Sardis “had lapsed from its pristine vitality, just as the township of Sardis had by this time declined from its old historical prestige.” Like the fig tree of Matthew 21:19 it had leaves but no fruit. Carid calls Sardis, “a perfect model of *inoffensive Christianity*”

- Robert Mounce



There is no indication of persecution against believers here. You don't have to fight against something that is dead. Sardis was too innocuous to be worth persecuting.

HOW CAN A CHURCH BE 'DEAD'?

- A. By focusing on upholding outward appearances but lack genuine love for God
- B. By ignoring its task of making Jesus known – of evangelism

When Jesus calls Peter with the words, “Come, follow me,” He continues with, “And I will send you out to fish for people.” (Matt 4:19). A church that is not active in sharing the news of Jesus will not need Jesus, and will lose its vitality – it's life. For we are made for mission with God.

“The more we deepen our relationship with God and find joy in Him, the more our evangelism will be enthusiastic and infectious. It will stop being an awkward exercise imposed on conversation as an act of duty. Instead, as an overflow of full hearts, we will speak enthusiastically of the One we love.



Instead of being like nearly empty toothpaste tubes, we'll become champagne bottles, waiting to explode, fizzing and bubbling over."

- Tim Chester

- C. By living without fidelity to the ways of Jesus. "The church had silently accommodated itself to the injustice and immorality of the city." – Darrell Johnson
- D. By disconnecting from Jesus as the Source of Life. "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit on its own; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing" (*John 15:4-5*).

Further, Jesus will later say that "the one who is victorious will, like them...", with 'them' being those who have not 'soiled their clothes' – which is likely a reference to the immorality and compromise of so many in that church. And Jesus calls them "worthy" – not a worthiness they've earned, but that they are living faithfully in the worthiness given them by Jesus – these ones will "be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and His angels" (Rev 3:5).

The way forward:

1. Wake up!
2. Strengthen what remains
3. Remember, hold fast, repent!

"**Remember**, therefore, what you have received and heard; **hold fast**, and **repent**."

We are preaching the gospel to our own hearts, and place ourselves in a community that rehearses the gospel regularly in singing, preaching and the practice of communion.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read **Revelation 3:1-6**. How does the omniscience (all-knowing) nature of Jesus help guide us into faithful to Him? How does it demonstrate His love and care for His church?

2. Should a church strive to have a 'good reputation'? How can a reputation actually hide the weakness of a church?

3. Have you every attempted to compromise your faith-based convictions in order to blend in or avoid conflict in your workplace, school, or neighbourhood? What does this temptation reveal about our hearts?

4. What does it mean for a church to be mired in spiritual slumber?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

5. What are some of the pathways to preaching to gospel to ourselves on a daily and weekly basis? Are there ways that you need to renew this practice of “remembering”?

6. Why is repentance not merely the beginning of the Christian life? Why would Jesus teach us to pray for forgiveness daily in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)? How does repentance function for you in your life of faith?

PRAYER

Take some time to pray for one another, and for our faith community. Ask where the Spirit is prompting you, and us, in response to this text. Pray for the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for our broader community of Kamloops that is in mourning during this time. Ask God for His grace, wisdom and healing presence.