

Wake Up!

Long Beach Alliance Church • October 21st, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

***So remember what you have received
and heard; and keep it, and repent.
Therefore if you do not wake up, I will
come like a thief, and you will not know
at what hour I will come to you.
~Revelation 3:3 (NASB)***

1) The Strength & Wealth Of Sardis

- A) Sardis was an extremely affluent city due to its location at the end of a lucrative trade route (note roads on center map), and the abundant presence of silver and gold (see pictures of local coinage).
- B) Sardis fell to military conquest when the “unscalable” cliffs surrounding the city (see acropolis picture) were breached. In the Greek world “capturing Sardis” was idiomatic for achieving the impossible.
- C) Sardis was also the home of an incredible temple complex built to cult worship of Artemis/Diana (see picture). The region experienced a catastrophic earthquake in 17 A.D. (during the time of Christ) which Pliny (famous Roman author) called “the greatest disaster in human history.”
- D) The wealth of Sardis extended deeply into both the local church and Jewish synagogue (see picture). The relationship between the culture and the local church reveals a laissez-faire attitude of deep accommodation.

2) Life Support For Sardis

- A) In a shocking irony, Jesus Christ compliments Sardis for their “name” (identity) “alive,” but criticizes this label with the reality that they are actually “dead” (Revelation 3:1).
- B) This helps us to see why Jesus Christ begins his letter to Sardis with descriptions including “the seven Spirits of God” and “the seven stars” (3:1, cf. 1:4, 1:20, 2:1).
- C) The problems in Sardis are not going to be solved through harder work or better understanding! The solution to the spiritual death which Sardis is experiencing is to WAKE UP (3:2), a call for spiritual life. Spiritual solutions are needed!
- D) The church needs Jesus Christ in their midst, because when He comes with the Spirit of God, He brings true spiritual insight, power, and vitality to the dead. Jesus resurrects dead people for new and greater things (3:2)!

3) Wake Up, Remember, Keep, Repent, Overcome

- A) In the beginning of a series of urgent commands, Jesus Christ calls the church to remember, receive, hear, guard, and repent (3:3). If they do not respond to this urgent call, the return of Christ will come, and they will miss it!
- B) Unfortunately, this is the condition of many in the church! Revelation calls us to live in urgent response to Jesus, to break out of lethargy according to a true view of Jesus (1:13-18). It’s not WHAT we do, it’s WHO we follow!
- C) To the overcomer (faithful, 3:5), Christ gives garments of white (Christ’s purity), a name of “life” (rather than death, cf. 3:1), and a name which Christ advocates with God and angels (no fear of judgment, cf. Matthew 10:32).
- D) Summarizing this letter, the church in Sardis has people who have slowly fallen to sleep, assimilating into the local culture to the extent they have become anesthetized to the effects of sin in their midst. Jesus calls for passion and perseverance as an authentic overcomer (hearer/doer, 3:6)!

maps & pictures of sardis



Map of the seven churches of Revelation (2:1-3:22). The book of Revelation was written by John, probably shortly after his exile on the island of Patmos (small island on the map to which John was exiled, just left of this note) to seven churches which may have been under John's previous leadership. Sardis is **circled** on the map.

The famous acropolis which was surrounded on three sides in Sardis, as seen from below. Due to erosion, the present summit is roughly one-third the size it would have been during the time of Cyrus (around 546 B.C., when the city originally fell to invaders).



Ruins from the temple of Artemis/Diana in Sardis. Remarkably, two Ionic columns (58 feet high each, can you see the man standing at the base of the left-side column?) still stand. Originally there were 78 standing columns in a 160' x 300' temple complex. In Sardis, Artemis was worshipped for her ability to bring the dead back to life (cf. Revelation 3:1).



The Pactolus river flowed through ancient Sardis and was a rich source of gold. Legend stated that Midas washed himself in the Pactolus, ridding his golden touch. This provided a local explanation for the wealth of gold in the river. Ancient historian Herodotus noted that the area near Sardis was the first to mint gold and silver coins—supported by the discovery of a nearby 6th century B.C. gold refinery.



Sardis was home to a wealthy and large Jewish community. The entrance to the synagogue (right), was attached to a larger Hellenistic gymnasium complex (upper). The gymnasium was a key feature of Greek education for the rich elite, catering to selected youth of important families. The gymnasium was the last place for Jews or Christians to be, but in Sardis, the connection was unmistakable. The large bowl in the center of the picture (right) was probably for ritual religious cleaning.



Growth Group Homework



Powering Up

1. What observations from this weekend's message on "Wake Up!" did you find to be the most interesting or challenging? Share your answer.
2. **I've Never...** Everyone needs a location to sit. One of the people in the group should volunteer to begin the game, move to the center of the room, and their seat is also removed from play.

This center person begins the game by saying "**I've Never...**" and then finishes the sentence with something they have never done (example, "**I've Never** had braces..." Yes, it's lame but it's still an example). Please make sure you DO NOT use experiences which are crass or controversial (example, "**I've Never** voted for a Republican..." or "**I've Never** gotten drunk..."). Let's keep it appropriate!

If you are sitting in the circle and you *HAVE* done the thing the person in the middle says they have not done, you HAVE to move to a different seat. The seat you move to CANNOT be next to you. The person in the middle sits down in one of the vacated seats as quickly as they can.

This will leave one poor soul without a seat. Thus, it is their turn to stand in the middle of the circle and begin (again) by saying "**I've Never...**" and so on. Have fun ☺!



Digging In

Have someone in your group read the short letter to Sardis found in Revelation 3:1-6, and answer the following questions.

1. It seems, especially compared to other churches which are addressed in Revelation 2-3, that the Sardian church was virtually untouched by persecution. Although it is simply conjecture, can you venture a guess from the words of Jesus, why this might be?



2. Many people who go to church and say and do all the right things. But Jesus asserts that some people can appear spiritually alive (☺) but actually be spiritually dead (☹). Why would someone try to appear differently than what is real? Can you tell the difference between a spiritually alive person and a spiritually dead person?

3. In His letter to Sardis, Jesus repeats the word “name” four times (note: Revelation 3:4 says “people” in some translations, but is actually “names” in the original language. The ESV provides a good translation: “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis...”). What do you think a person’s “name” represents? What is Jesus’ point in repeating “name” so often through this short letter to Sardis?



Connecting To Life

1. What part of the letter to the church in Sardis do you find the most personally impacting? Please share your thoughts with your Growth Group.

2. Most followers of Jesus Christ would have to admit that looking spiritually together is often easier than actually being spiritually together. Most people would agree, hypocrisy is alive and well in any church. A Growth Group is a place where we can drop our “masks” of religiosity, and allow our true selves be known. This doesn’t happen quickly, and it doesn’t happen automatically. What are one or two things you feel would help you to be more honest, open, or authentic with your Growth Group? If comfortable, please share your ideas with your Growth Group.