



## Frisco First Baptist Church

7 LETTERS TO THE CHURCH LETTER TO SARDIS REVELATION 3:1-6 6/1/2025

### MAIN POINT

Jesus desires that we consistently fix our minds and hearts on the gospel, renewing our love and passion for Him as we do.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is one pattern or habit of your day-to-day life that you can't imagine not doing?**

**Why are you so faithful to that particular activity?**

**Growing up, were there any spiritual patterns in place in your home, such as family devotion time or bedtime prayer? If so, what do you remember most about those times?**

Children are at their best when the rhythms of life are predictable and well-known. Sometimes as adults, though, our routines get us in trouble. So much of life is about routine and habit that it's easy to see how we can slip into spiritual ruts in our relationship with God. If we don't pay attention, church and church activities can become just another part of our week that gets lost in the daily grind. But Jesus expects more of His followers. He expects us and our families to live on mission for Him, and this means that how we worship should match how we feel about Him.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 3:1-6.

**In Revelation 3, we read another one of Jesus' letters to the seven churches, a church He cared about and wanted to see change for the better.**

**What did the works of the church at Sardis reveal about their spiritual condition?**

This letter is intended by the Lord as an urgent spiritual wake-up call. If the church at Sardis did not strengthen what remained spiritually, they would die because they had not followed through on the works that honored God. The reputation these believers had was one of holiness and spiritual life, but apparently, that was just a facade. On the inside, in their hearts and attitudes, they did not shine for Christ.

**What kinds of things might characterize a Christian or a church that has the reputation of being alive, but is actually dead?**

**Why is this such a scary possibility?**

There is no praise here for the church at Sardis. In fact, Jesus' criticism is particularly frightening, because it seems that Jesus is the only One who knows the church's true condition. Others might have looked at the church at Sardis and seen life, but Jesus knows the truth—spiritually they were as good as dead. Unfortunately, this is an attitude that is way too easy for us to slip into, which is especially scary considering the consequences Jesus described in verse 3.

**How might good works hide a spiritually dead church? In what way are works incomplete (v. 2)?**

**What, then, did Jesus tell this church to do (v. 3)?**

**What do you think the church should remember?**

In this spiritually dead place, Jesus' commands are simple. They should remember God's blessing and repent of their spiritual deadness. In other words, they needed to recover the spiritual life and vigor they once had.

**How can remembering the blessings of God serve to awaken a church that is spiritually dead?**

**What, then, in your own words, was the action point for this church that needed correction?**

This letter was meant to be an urgent wake-up call. At some point, Jesus would be returning, and if He found the church in its current state, they would be truly dead. But if they woke up to the present reality of Jesus and remembered the great blessing of the gospel, their good works would be complete and they would be ready for Jesus to come back.

**Read verses 4-6 again. What do these verses reveal about some of the Christians in Sardis?**

**What do you understand the soiled clothes imagery to mean?**

Jesus pointed out that in the midst of a church of people who were going through the motions of their faith, whose actions didn't match their attitudes toward God, a few people stood out. These people were genuine in their relationship with God. They had not "soiled their clothes" by assuming that the appearance of true religion can substitute for the reality. Unlike the other people in the church, these Christians were not pretending.

**What did these people gain by faithfully following Christ?**

Christ does not ask these faithful few to leave the nominal majority, but to maintain their presence as witnesses. They may have a difficult time doing so, but Christ commends them as worthy of special praise. They will appear dressed in white one day, revealed as truly righteous. Their righteousness was not the appearance, but the reality.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What lesson is there for you to learn from the story of Sardis?**

**Think about your home. What do you and your family "appear to be" to those watching from the outside? How does that compare with what you are actually living like?**

**Why is merely going through the motions of spiritual life or church life so easy to do? How have you seen this tendency creep into your life or your family's life? What is one step you could take toward counteracting this tendency?**

**How can we be a group that helps its members remain aware of who they are in God?**

# PRAYER

Share prayer requests with the group, specifically ones related to the truths in today's text. During your closing prayer time, ask God to help your group members assess their true attitude toward worship and renew their heartfelt obedience and love for Him.

## COMMENTARY

### | REVELATION 3:1-6

3:1. The risen Lord declared to the church in Sardis that he holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The life-giving Spirit was badly needed by the lifeless church in Sardis. What could be more exciting in any era than for Christ to "bring his hands together" so that pastors are overflowing with the Spirit? The church in Sardis received only criticism from Jesus. The only other church similarly faulted is the seventh church, Laodicea. The complaint Christ lodges against this church is that its reputation is faulty. Others may think this congregation is lively; Christ knows (note again the I know) differently. The church is almost spiritually dead. A corpse may be beautiful, but it is still dead. In contemporary terms, the Sardis church was filled with "nominal Christians."

3:2-4. The urgent command Christ gives lies in a series of five verbs: wake up ... strengthen ... remember ... obey ... repent. Foreign armies had captured the city of Sardis twice in its history because of its failure to watch. The Christians of Sardis now have an opportunity to avoid a parallel spiritual destiny. The church's deeds appeared wonderful to those outside the church, but they were not complete in the sight of ... God Christ did not accuse them of heresy, but neither had they offended Romans or unbelieving Jews. They were not being persecuted, but they had offended God by emphasizing formality over reality. Part of the remedy was for this church to remember its glorious past, when it had been spiritually alive. When the Christians at Sardis were converted, they had received something important. While surely they had received the gospel, they had also received the Holy Spirit of life. They had forgotten about the Spirit's work. They must repent of their neglect of the Spirit and obey the command to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

Christ had threatened to judge the unloving Ephesian church by removing its lampstand if it did not repent (2:5). He had promised to judge the heretical teachers in Pergamum by fighting with his sword against them if they did not repent. Now he threatens to judge the lifeless church of Sardis by coming against them like a thief at an unexpected time. Some interpreters believe this refers to Christ's second coming, which is often said to be like a

thief (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). However, in this context the “coming” of the Lord to judge will take place only if the church does not repent. The second advent of Christ is not conditional. Thus, just as the city of Sardis had succumbed to unexpected military attack, so the church of Sardis will be visited by Christ’s judgment—if it does not change.

Is it possible for a “dead orthodox” church to change? In the case of Sardis, the answer was “yes” because a few people had remained faithful. They had not soiled their clothes by assuming that the appearance of true religion can substitute for the reality. Christ does not ask these faithful few to leave the nominal majority but to maintain their presence as a witness. They may have a difficult time doing so, but Christ commends them as worthy of special praise. They will appear dressed in white one day, revealed as truly righteous. Their righteousness was not the appearance but the reality, because they “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Their righteousness was based on Christ’s death for them, which resulted in righteous living.

3:5-6. Verse 5 mentions he who overcomes; verse 6 refers to the one who has an ear. These elements are repeated in all seven letters, as well as the reference to what the Spirit says to the churches (see discussion at 2:7). These overcomers from all ages and all churches will be dressed in white just as the faithful few in Sardis will be clothed. The symbol of God’s divine ledger goes back as far as Exodus 32:33—“The Lord replied to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.’ ” In the present text, Christ specifies his commitment to the overcomers with a negative and positive promise. First, their names will never be blotted from the book of life. Second, their names will be acknowledged before my Father and his angels. Both of these symbolize eternal life. In ancient times, all citizens of a city might be listed in the “citizenship registry.” To be erased from such a book would mean one was not (or no longer) a citizen. All those who were citizens had the right to be announced or acknowledged before the king and his court.

Overcomers demonstrate their righteousness in this life by confessing Christ faithfully before a hostile world through the help of the Spirit of God. In their heavenly existence Christ will faithfully confess them before the very angels of God. Jesus had made an identical promise during his earthly ministry. “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).