

LETTER 5 **SARDIS**



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE SARDIS: **THE SLUMBERING CHURCH**

Revelation 3:1-6

WORSHIP

Last week, Pastor Ben said that the way to hold on in our faith is to return to the goodness and graciousness of Christ as seen in the gospel. Christ's saving work on the cross is the ultimate expression of God's love and care for us. It is the ultimate source of our comfort and joy in this fallen world. So in this time of great uncertainty, let us return to the gospel. Let us again reflect on its implications. Let us turn to the Lord in loving praise and worship for having given us so great a gift.

Please read and reflect on these words by Paul from **1 Thessalonians 5:9-10**: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him."

FELLOWSHIP

When was a time in your life when you were particularly struck by the power, goodness, or comfort of the gospel?

DISCUSSION

Begin by reading Revelation 3:1-6.

Unlike the letters we've seen so far, the letter to the church in Sardis is almost entirely *negative* in its assessment. Jesus offers them no major commendation. In fact, with the exception of a few faithful members, Jesus describes the Sardian church as "dead," despite its public reputation for being alive and well. Jesus commands them to "wake up" before it's too late.

Interestingly, the inflated reputation of the Sardian church mirrors the inflated reputation of the city itself. Sardis was once one of Asia's most glorious cities. Founded around 1200 BC, it became an extremely wealthy trade center and textile producer. It was the first city to mint gold and silver coins, and it claimed to be the first city to dye wool. Sardis was also famous for being an impregnable military stronghold. The city's acropolis was surrounded on three sides by 1,500-foot cliffs. For centuries, it was thought that Sardis could not be captured.

However, the glory of Sardis was eventually diminished by a series of disasters. First, this supposedly invulnerable city was captured, not once, but twice (546 and 214 BC) when its watchmen failed to notice invaders scaling the "unscalable" cliffs surrounding the city. Then, in AD 17, a terrible earthquake devastated Sardis, leveling much of it to the ground. The restoration efforts saddled the city with tremendous debt, and certain construction projects, like the temple to Artemis, were left unfinished. By the end of the first century AD, Sardis was a mere shadow of its former glory.

Like the Sardian watchmen who twice failed to protect the city, the Sardian church lacks vigilance. There is no mention of intense pressure or persecution leading them astray. Instead, they comfortably drifted off and allowed themselves to be taken by the surrounding culture. They must "wake up" and repent. They must follow the example, not of the surrounding culture, but of the few Christians in their midst who have remained pure, the ones who will be acknowledged by Jesus before the Father and His angels (3:5).

1. What does it mean for a church to be asleep/dead?
2. How can a church have a reputation for being alive when it is, in fact, dead?

3. Do you think the American church is spiritually vigilant? In what ways are we resisting culture? In what ways are we accommodating to culture?
4. What does it mean for a church (or individual) to “wake up” spiritually? How is it done?
5. What should one do if their church is asleep/dead? Should they leave the church, or should they work to awaken the church?
6. In verse 3, Jesus says that He “will come like a thief.” The New Testament often uses this analogy for Jesus’s second coming (Rev. 16:15; Matt. 24:42-44; Lk. 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). Has the reality of Christ’s second coming and God’s judgment ever awakened you to repentance and renewed faithfulness?
7. What is one tangible way that you can be more “awake” to Christ this week?

LETTER WRITING CHALLENGE

Take this week to catch up on your letter writing:

- Letter to God
- Letter to someone who is hurting
- Letter to your future self about cultural challenges in the moment
- Letter to a missionary

PRAYER

*Lord God, heavenly Father,
make us watchful and heedful
in awaiting the coming of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
that when he stands at the door and knocks,
he may find us not sleeping in carelessness and sin,
but awake and rejoicing in his appearing;
through your beloved Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one true God, now and forever.
Amen.*

Written by the Viet Dietrich (1549)