

## Revelation 3:1-6

### Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church *Are You Sleeping?*

Exactly 33 years ago yesterday a total of 28 men, women, and children met for the very first service of Faith Community Church. Within 5 years we had purchased this property and dedicated our first building. That was back when what's Riedel Road out here was a dirt road leading back to a horse farm. Finally after much work and sacrifice we dedicated this current building on September 9, 2001.

Two days later our country suffered the horrendous attack of September 11. Where were you on September 11, 2001? Where were you when you heard the news that we'd been attacked? I'm sure that everyone in this room who's old enough remembers exactly where they were, exactly what they were doing on that day.

September 11, 2001 is a day that changed our country forever. As a church that had just completed a new building we were looking forward to just having one service for a while. That lasted one week. There were a lot of people looking for answers, all of a sudden feeling very vulnerable.

What was an eye opener for me was just how quickly that spiritual surge our country experienced after 9.11 faded. How quickly people kind of went back to life as usual.

What happens that even God's people can seem to doze off in the face of our world's pressing spiritual needs?

We're in a series we're calling *Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church*. What we're doing is looking at Jesus' message to each of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3.

As we've seen already, these are churches that existed in 1<sup>st</sup> century Asia Minor. They're all located in what we know as the country of Turkey today.

There are 2 things that make Jesus' messages to these churches relevant for us today. First, they're in God's recorded message to mankind, the Bible. That gives them authority and significance and practicality right there.

But second, each of Jesus' challenges to the churches ends with these words, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. (Revelation 3:6) Or as the Message translates, *Are your ears awake? Listen*.

There's a question here for us as individuals and as a church in each of these messages to these congregations. Hopefully our ears are awake and we're listening.

### **Revelation 3 page 1205**

Sardis certainly isn't a name most people recognize today. Unless they are a historian, familiar with Revelation, or from Sardis, TN, if you asked most people, "Where or what is Sardis?" they couldn't tell you. But it wasn't always that way.

In the sixth century B.C. Sardis was one of the most powerful and richest cities of the ancient world.

It was built in the middle of a river plain on a plateau that was about fifteen hundred feet above the valley. The sides of the plateau were sheer cliffs. An enemy could be seen approaching for miles all around. The city was

nearly impregnable. Looking at Sardis from a distance was like looking at a gigantic watchtower above the Hermus Valley.

Sardis grew until it couldn't fit on the plateau and the building spilled over into the valley. It became a split level city - upper and lower Sardis. Lower Sardis had a river running through it.

Herodotus, the ancient Roman historian said that river brought Sardis a great quantity of gold dust. In fact the first gold coins in recorded history were minted in Sardis.

Sardis was known throughout the ancient world for its wealth, and also for its arrogance and pride. Because of that pride, the city fell twice when it thought it never could.

The first time was in 549 BC. Cyrus king of Persia had laid siege to Sardis but the people of Sardis weren't worried. After all, the Persians couldn't scale 1500-foot rock cliffs.

Actually they could. A Persian soldier saw a Sardinian guard drop his helmet over the wall. A short time later he appeared down at the bottom. The Persians discovered the way up and Sardis was overthrown.

A city with a history like Sardis would certainly understand what the risen Christ was talking about when He said, "Wake up!"

It's been said that any people who forget their history are doomed to repeat it. History did repeat itself in the city of Sardis. Two hundred years later the city fell again in much the same way.

In 334 BC Sardis surrendered to Alexander the Great. In 133 BC it passed into the hands of the Romans. Under Roman rule the city flourished until an earthquake devastated it in 17 AD. But even that didn't put an end to Sardis.

The Emperor Tiberius helped them rebuild and by 26 AD it was again known as a great city. It was once again a rich city. They were rich with gold. They were a center of the wool industry. Five roads converged at Sardis so they were a trading hub for all of Asia Minor.

At that point Sardis had existed for over 700 years!

Around 50 AD Paul the Apostle started a congregation in Ephesus. The Ephesians were excited about their faith and eventually helped spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to all of Asia Minor, including Sardis.

A church was born there and it was 45 years old by the time John wrote The Revelation. So the church at Sardis was a well-established congregation. It had been around longer than Faith Community Church.

Unfortunately...

*I. A Church Can Appear Full Of Life When It's Not*

**Read verse 1**

*You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* Jesus is saying, "From all outward appearances, you're a going church. To other people looking in from the outside the life, the reality of God is evidently active in Sardis. But I know you're really dead."

The verb that Jesus uses for "I know" is *eido* in Greek. It means, "to know by observation."

So in other words Jesus is saying, "I know what it looks like to other people, but I can see in a different way." The Bible says, *The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.* (I Samuel 16:7)

The place might have been famous for wool but Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, says, "You can't pull the wool over my eyes."

And notice how Jesus Christ describes Himself. He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

The seven Spirits are referred to 4 times, all in the first 5 chapters of Revelation.

There have been a lot of strange interpretations of what these seven Spirits might be but almost every conservative interpreter realizes this is talking about the Holy Spirit. Even the fact that the translators capitalized the word "Spirit" shows that's what they believed too. (There are no small and capital letters in the original. Manuscripts were either minuscule: all lower case, or uncial: all upper case.)

In his commentary on Revelation, Charles Ryrie writes, The "seven Spirits" likely represent the sevenfold ministry of the Spirit as depicted in Isaiah 11:2.

Isaiah 11:2 reads this way, *The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*

1. The Spirit of the Lord
2. The Spirit of Wisdom.
3. The Spirit of Understanding.
4. The Spirit of Counsel.
5. The Spirit of Might.
6. The Spirit of Knowledge.
7. The Spirit of Fear of the Lord.

Harry Ironside, a great commentator from a generation past writes, "There you have the one Spirit in the sevenfold plenitude of His power."

So Jesus says, "Remember that the One speaking to you has the authority and power of the Holy Spirit."

Then He adds, *and the seven stars.* Three times before this it says Jesus has seven stars in His right hand. The right hand signifies the place of authority. Revelation one says, *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.* (Revelation 1:20)

So it's like He's challenging this church, "The One who's confronting you on your deadness, the One who's going to command you to repent, is coming to you with the authority and power of God. I'm holding you in my hand."

That's a message to a church in a well-to-do, spiritually complacent culture who had become a fairly well-to-do, spiritually complacent church.

Twice when Sardis was captured they were so sure of themselves they didn't even post any troops at the battlements. They weren't watching. They thought they were OK.

That's the church at Sardis spiritually. They were sleeping at the wheel.

So what's Jesus' question to FCC? Could He be asking us that same question? "Are you awake or sleeping?"

What if we're like Sardis and have a good appearance but we kind of leave out the Holy Spirit? If God the Holy Spirit made His exit from FCC tomorrow would things just keep running as usual because we work hard and we try to be organized? Is Jesus Christ really the authority in this church?

How about in our own personal lives? That's where it has to start. If we're not Spirit filled and controlled, if we're not submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ in our personal lives then there's no way it's going to be true of the church. We are the church.

*I. A Church Can Appear Full Of Life When It's Not*

*II. If A Church Doesn't Wake up, Jesus Christ Will Judge*

### **Read verses 2 & 3**

Those are some sobering words, aren't they? That phrase *as a thief* is used 5 times in the Bible and it always refers to judgment. The point is, it will happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Thieves don't send you an email ahead of time or post on your Facebook page letting you know they're coming over to your house to rob you. A thief relies on the element of surprise.

Now think about the warning here. "Hey, if you don't wake up, get your act together and turn around, I'm going to come like a thief in the night and I'm going to make off with your church. The star will be gone. The candlestick will be gone. The church will be gone."

You know what makes those words even more unsettling to me? The church isn't just an organization that Jesus runs. It's a living entity. In fact the church is the body of Christ.

### **Turn to Colossians chapter 1 page 1154**

There was a great trade route that extended from Ephesus to the Euphrates river. About 120 miles down that road was the city of Colossae. A man named Epaphras founded a church there.

What we're looking at in our Bibles is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote from a Roman prison cell to the church to encourage them. And here's his daily prayer for them. If you want to know how to effectively pray for one another, here it is.

### **Read verses 9-12**

That's a great prayer. I don't think they were praying that for each other in Sardis or they wouldn't have been in the shape they were in.

But how is it the Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints? How could that be since we're all so unsaintly at times?

Here it is... **Read verses 13,14**

I know it's hard for us to fully grab onto but we have a big problem. We're born into this world held under the power of darkness. That doesn't mean we all belong to covens and worship Satan, it means we're in spiritual darkness. We need to be delivered and God had to do it.

When UPS delivers a package to you they've taken it from some other location and brought it to your location. That package couldn't get there on it's own or it wouldn't need to be delivered.

Think about that. Why do we need God to deliver us from spiritual darkness to spiritual light? Because we can't get there on our own. He has to do it.

How does He do it? He redeems us (which means "buys us back") with the most precious price that's ever been paid, the blood of the Son of His love.

God our judge gave His Son Jesus on a cross so that we could be forgiven. That just blows me away.

That shows us something. We're desperately in need of having our sins forgiven by God. And without the cross we'd be hopelessly lost.

The Bible says, *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.* (Galatians 2:16)

The "works of the law" here means the commandments. As holy and pure as God's commandments are, no one can keep them perfectly and God is a perfect God.

There must be a payment for sin. God's holy wrath and justice must be satisfied. Jesus is that satisfaction.

To appropriate what God has done for us in Christ there's only one thing we can do. Believe in Jesus Christ. Believe that He died and rose again for us.

Colossians 1 goes on to say, Jesus who died is the Creator of all. Everything, including us, is by Him and for Him. It's all about Him. Then look at verse 18...

**Read 18a**

The people at Sardis didn't start off as just a group of slaves of God. Those believers were part of Christ's body. If you believe, you're part of Christ's body. He's the head and we're the body.

**Back to Revelation 3**

When Jesus said, Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. He was talking to people who claimed to be redeemed. These were people who claimed to be part of His body. He's willing to remove their candlestick, for His honor and glory!

Do you get the idea that this is really serious business for God? God cares about His body the church and God cares about local churches like Faith Community Church.

He cares so much that He's willing to bring down judgment to wake us up if we fall asleep.

Now I don't mean by that that I believe that 9.11 was directly orchestrated by God to speak to us as a nation. It was orchestrated by evil men who hate anything that's even remotely connected with Christianity.

But I have no doubt that God uses events like 9.11 to challenge us to wake up. And if we don't respond to something as dramatic as 9.11, I don't know what it's going to take.

What's the solution? The solution is in verse 3. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain... Remember therefore how you have received and heard; holdfast and repent.

Here's the question, what happened to this church? How come it died?

Now follow this: of the seven churches of Asia Minor that Jesus spoke to, Sardis was the only one not troubled by persecution. It was the only one not disturbed by false teaching. It was the only one who didn't face opposition from the Jewish community.

Didn't the pagans in Sardis practice Caesar worship? In fact Sardis was in competition with Pergamos for which place got to be the center of Caesar worship in Asia Minor. Pergamos won but Sardis came in second. They were serious about worshipping the Emperor and making sure everybody burned incense and said, "Caesar is Lord" as a once a year requirement.

Weren't there any pagan temples in Sardis? The temple of the fertility goddess, Artemis in Sardis was the fourth largest Ionic temple in the world. They worshipped the Earth goddess Cybele who in other countries was called Isis and Ishtar. That worship could be pretty wild and immoral.

Wasn't there a Synagogue in Sardis? There was and normally that would have meant conflict for the church because the Jews saw Christianity as a perversion of Judaism.

How come everybody seemed to leave the congregation at Sardis alone? Because the church of Sardis had an inoffensive, nonaggressive Christianity.

The church of Sardis never pressed the Jews in town with the claim "Jesus is God."

If they did we know the synagogue would have opposed them. The church of Sardis never once countered the Roman claim "Caesar is Lord" with the Christian claim "Jesus is Lord." If they had, the Romans would have persecuted them. The church of Sardis never took a stand against participation in the sexual immorality or feasts of pagan worship. If they had, the Nicolaitan heresy - a heresy which said it was OK for Christians to participate in these aspects of pagan worship - would have been in town.

The fact was, the church of Sardis was complacent, apathetic, indifferent, and dead. The church, like the town, felt too sheltered, too secure, too comfortable, to maintain a close guard or watch.

The church always has to be on guard against getting too comfortable.

It's not that we want to just dwell on the negative but if the messages and classes, and Bible studies here never make you respond by saying, "Man, I need to do some serious evaluation of my life. That message made me feel kind of uncomfortable." There's something wrong.

If FCC doesn't clearly stake out where we stand and what we believe, we'll end up just a social club. If this church doesn't challenge and question and rock the boat, if we always let things go smoothly and comfortably, we're no longer speaking prophetically.

- I. A Church Can Appear Full Of Life When It's Not*
- II. If A Church Doesn't Wake up, Jesus Christ Will Judge*
- III. When A Church Wakes Up, Jesus Rewards It*

#### **Read verse 4**

There were a few Christians in the church in Sardis who hadn't compromised. A few who hadn't compromised and a majority who had.

That must have been hard. Why didn't the few just leave that church and go to one that was serious about God? Because in the early days of Christianity there was no other place to go. There wasn't another congregation down the road to attend. The church in Sardis was the church in Sardis.

#### **Read verse 5**

Who's Jesus talking about here? Who is it who overcomes? I John 5:5 clarifies this for us. *This is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Here's where things really get exciting. Every believer in Jesus has already overcome the world in the most crucial of ways.

Their faith that they put in Jesus' cross constitutes a victory over this world's system, which is ultimately a kingdom of spiritual darkness.

People just don't walk around and come up with God's way of salvation on their own. People think, "I'm going to do something to earn God's favor. I'm going to be religious enough, good enough, whatever it is, to get on God's good side."

No one just thinks, "Salvation must be by grace through faith." That goes against our pride.

It takes God's truth in the Bible and God's Holy Spirit working in our heart for us to understand grace and faith instead of works.

Faith is the victory. Believing in the Christ of the cross is a spiritual victory over spiritual darkness and confusion.

But I believe there's another side to the overcoming that Jesus is talking about here. This is kingdom terminology.

Look back at **chapter 2, verse 26**

This is kingdom terminology. We can't earn the forgiveness of sins. Jesus did that on the cross. But what we can earn is a place of authority in God's earthly kingdom.

Jesus said, *But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Luke 22:29-30)

Look at **chapter 3 and verse 21**

After the rapture, after the seven year tribulation, after the battle of Armageddon comes the 1000 year earthly kingdom. It's one of the most talked about events in the whole Bible.

And here's where rewards for being awake and being faithful to the commands of God come in. It says again in verse 5 *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

In Biblical times each king would keep a register of his subjects. It was kind of like a census. If you moved your name would be taken out of the book. If you died your name would be taken out of the book. But if you displeased the king, if you did something that really upset him, your name would be blotted out and you'd be considered an enemy of the state.

Jesus is making a beautiful promise here. You might paraphrase it this way; "Some petty, self-serving king might blot you out of his book, but I'll never blot your name out of my book. You belong to me."

"Instead, what I am going to do is confess your name before My Father and before His angels. I'm going to say, 'That person, and that person, and that person over there. They belong to me.'"

Here's our challenge again. Here's what we find at the end of every one of these letters.

**Read verse 6**

Are you listening? Are we listening as a body here at this church? The city of Sardis had an amazing history. But it also had a sad history of pride, arrogance, apathy. The church at Sardis had an amazing history. But it also had a sad history of pride, arrogance, apathy. That's what sparked Jesus' message here in Revelation 3.

William Barclay writes, "The state of the church at Sardis was serious, but it was not beyond hope. The words of the risen Christ are a condemnation, but they're also a summons and a challenge to awake, while yet there is time."

Are you sleeping this morning? Let's be real careful that this congregation doesn't pull "a Sardis."

Could we be attacked again by terrorists again? Sure we could. Could the next time be even worse than 9.11? I believe it could. The question that Jesus has for us today is this: "Where are you spiritually? Are you so confident in your country that you think the US could never fall? I mean think about it. All it took for Sardis was a guy dropping his helmet over the wall.

Are you so confident in yourself that you think you could never fall? *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (I Corinthians 10:12)



I would pray that it wouldn't take another 9.11 event to wake us up. Are your ears awake? Listen.