

To The Church

Letters from the book of Revelation

Slumbering in Sardis

This week we examine the letter written to the church in the city of Sardis, just 50km from Thyatira. As Sardis was built on a narrow plateau, it was protected from its potential enemies by the terrain. It was a wealthy city, and had the reputation for great skill in the arts, particularly in the textile industry.

Though the church in Sardis was under far less pressure and temptation than some of the other churches mentioned in the book of Revelation, Christ addressed them strongly, and called them out on their lack of authentic righteousness. He loved this church fiercely and wanted her to wake up from her spiritual slumber in order to be the witness she was called to be, at that time, in that city.

The message is just as clear for us today. Will we respond to the call to wake up and stop “playing church” and instead *be* the church that Christ has called us to be?

Today's Text - Revelation 3:1-6

1. Jesus Cares About Our Righteousness, Not Our Reputation

- Read Revelation 3:1-2, Psalm 32:3 & Psalm 51:3-4

The church in Sardis received no praise from Jesus, unlike the other churches in the letters we have read thus far. Without persecution or heresy in their midst, they were free to live zealously for the gospel, and yet it was in this very context that Jesus called them “dead”. They may have been well known for being vibrant and for doing great works as a church community, but from God’s perspective, it was all ‘smoke and mirrors’.

This shows us clearly that a church can have all the right things in place, and yet still be failing spiritually. It would be nearly impossible to detect from the outside, but easily seen by the Lord himself. God sees what is really going on in our hearts, despite how we may appear to other people.

Many of us are only concerned about our sin because of what others would think if they found out, but we don’t worry too much about what God thinks. This passage is a timely reminder of how God views the sin in our hearts. God wants us to walk uprightly, rather than living a life of pretense. He wants us to be open and vulnerable about our failures and successes with him and with one another.

Q. What is our reputation as a church? (Are we considered to be alive, doing great works in the city, loving the poor and the vulnerable, while also being community oriented?)

Q. How do you think we can determine if we are just “playing church” rather than *being* the church that Christ has called us to be in this city?

Q. How does our being open and honest about our weaknesses, sins, failures and successes, in Christian community help us to overcome sin?

Q. What do you fear most when you consider being totally transparent with your Gospel Community about your sins and failures?

Q. Why is our wearing of the Christian “mask” not okay with Christ?

2. Jesus Calls Us To Repentance

- Read Revelation 3:2a, 3:3a

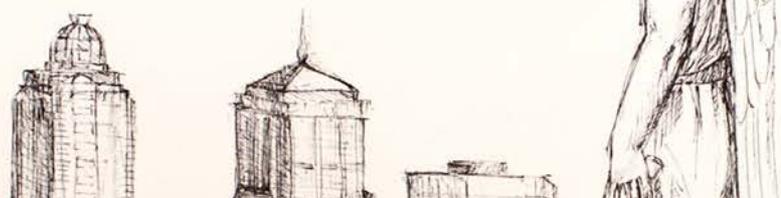
The church in Sardis was more concerned about their reputation than about their own righteousness. Jesus did not just bring that to their attention, but warned them to be alert, and called them to step up.

He did not consider them a lost cause, but rather instructed them to strengthen themselves, and to choose to change course.

They were to do this by:

- i. Remembering the gospel message
- ii. Keeping the gospel message close to their hearts
- iii. Repenting – not only should they recognise the wrong in their hearts, but they should actively turn their hearts away from sin and back to God.

The only way we can remain watchful of the temptation to stray from true gospel living, is to remain in authentic and transparent community, where others have the permission to speak truth into our lives, and to help us with our blind spots regarding sin, temptation and compromise.



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The next set of questions are incredibly personal and could be a “game-changer” for your Gospel Community.

Q. What is currently more important to you: walking righteously before God or walking “righteously” before people, so that they hold you in high esteem spiritually?

Q. What would repentance look like for someone (including you) who realizes that they have wrongly focused on people’s opinions rather than Christ’s?

Q. What sin/s are you allowing in your life, that you need to bring to the attention of your Gospel Community, in order that you can “wake-up”, or rise up to who God wants you to be? (In doing so, you are giving them permission to: call you out on that sin in the future, show you where you may be being deceived, help you detect blind-spots, or help you see when you desire compromise or want to give in because of your love of sin. Taking this step is usually incredibly difficult for those of us who either hold too highly our spiritual reputation, or for those of us who love our sin too much. But it is critical if we are going to live in repentance and faith – and be the people that God has called us to be).

3. **Jesus Is A Righteous Judge**

- Read Revelation 3:3b, Hebrews 12:4-6, 1 John 1:9, James 5:1

God longs for us to turn from our sin and walk back to him in faith. Time and time again in the Scriptures, we see God giving his people time to repent. But there comes a time when God no longer calls his people to repent, but instead comes to judge them for their continual and willful disobedience. As a church we need to prayerfully consider the ways in which God is calling us to “wake up” or repent, and then we should respond to his kind offer of grace before we have to face his discipline.

This passage is a call for us to drop the façade of spiritual perfection, and to come clean about our sin. We can confess our sins to one another and to Christ who will forgive us, and we can move towards him, being assured of restoration and freedom.

Q. Why do you think we are so resistant to God’s call to repentance?

Q. Why is it difficult for us to accept that God disciplines us when we continue to live in willful disobedience?

Q. Why is God’s call to repentance actually a sign of his grace towards us?

Q. Why does a truly righteous life bring about more freedom than the life lived for the pleasures of sin?

4. **Jesus Has A Remnant To Whom He Gives Victory**

- Read Revelation 3:4-6

Despite the rebuke, God still saw some in the church who had not followed after their sinful hearts and had remained faithful to Christ. It is encouraging to know that God sees and knows of the faithful in our community. This has to make us stop and ask ourselves if we are part of the few that he considers as faithful or not. If we are not, are we going to shrug our shoulders in despair, or are we going to respond to his call to repent and turn our hearts and lives around? Remaining faithful comes at a huge cost in this life, but in the end, when it really counts, we will have conquered with Christ. The rewards of faithfulness in the future far outweigh the compromise of today.

Q. What does it mean for us to remain faithful to Christ and to persevere to the end?

Q. Why is it important to keep reminding ourselves (and reminding one another) of the future reward for our faithfulness to Christ?

Practical Group Questions. How do you think that we as Gospel Community could become really good at calling one another to faithfulness to Christ? What do you think that should look like practically? How do you think we would respond individually to others in the group calling us to this kind of life on a regular basis?

