

## Eastertide Revelation Letters #5

# Letter to Sardis

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We are in a series of the letters to the churches in the book of Revelation



Before we get to the letter to Sardis today, I would like to talk little about parenthood. Today is Mother's Day! Being a parent has been a great experience for me but I want you to know that kids are *really gross* in many ways. Rod warned me about this before we had our first child: "(Mark), you as a father will never know what your wife goes through to be a mom so you as a father should do your part and change as many diapers as you can!" So I think I've changed a

diaper daily for the last 6 years and of course, I've gotten all kinds of bodily fluids on me. **It's gross.**

Parenthood



This week I have reflected that I did all these things to my parents...and I also have a heavenly Father who says I am his child. He also cares for me when I am messy and gross *spiritually*: we're broken, dirty, and can't figure things out. This is what it's like to be a child of the Heavenly Father who cleans us up and wipes our boogers out of our noses. ***Hold on to this as we walk into the passage on Sardis.***

Here are some photos mom and sister took when they visited the REAL PLACE of Sardis.

Sardis





Historically, the wealthy city of Sardis traded in dye wools and was often attacked; consequently, it was destroyed a number of times. It's also the capital of the Lydian Empire. At one point, the king of the Lydian Empire went to battle against Cyrus and the Persians (remember, Cyrus was over the Israelites when they were in exile in Babylon). Sardis was wiped out, leaving no archaeological evidence. It was rebuilt and Alexander the Great Hellenized Sardis. Then the Romans took over and around the time of Jesus's teen years, Sardis was destroyed again by an earthquake. Emperor Tiberius said the people of Sardis didn't have to pay taxes for five years and he rebuilt the city, which shows what an important city it was. But to get an idea of what was really happening there, let's read through today's passage.

**3** "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

**These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.**

The angel is the one who carries the good news, the word of God. Every letter to the churches starts off with a picture from Revelation 1 which says Jesus stood before the 7-fold spirits of God. To understand this, first know that seven is the complete number and used many times in Revelation. It's the wholeness and completeness of God's Spirit in Jesus as King.

The seven stars are the seven angels, the carriers of God's word into each place. Jesus is saying here that he is holding the carriers of the message in his hand: he has the whole Spirit of God in his hand.

Last week, Eric talked about the basic outline of each letter: Jesus says Who He is, He then encourages the church by telling them what they are doing well, and then he rebukes them. But to Sardis, there is no encouragement:

**I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.**

This is his “encouragement” to Sardis! **Reputation** is a good word in our culture: we like our reputation and we like to portray ourselves in certain ways to the world around us. You can control what the world sees about you on social media. You can curate a particular reputation: your relationship with your spouse is great, your life is going well, or maybe everything is falling apart and you need help. Beyond social media: we have a mask on all the time: “How are you doing?” “I’m doing well” (Don’t ask me any more questions).

Sardis has a **reputation** of being **alive**: this word means **animated**. It’s the opposite of zombies who are dead and looking for something to consume. In Christ we have life and purpose: this is true animation. Sardis was really just a bunch of zombies wandering around.

This reminded me of when I first moved to Tucson and took classes at Pima, paid for by my dad. I would tell my dad the classes were going great even though the previous year I had flunked out. All the time, I was dropping and failing every class. Since then, I have looked at my transcript and noticed that I had not completed any classes to that point. The reality was I was not a good student; I was dead. I was depressed and alone, watching TV and playing video games. I have had to work through the loss of trust with my dad. **We do this: we have a reputation that does not reflect who we are.**

**2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds *unfinished* in the sight of my God.**

This is appropriate to have an exclamation point here! These people were asleep in the middle of a storm: everything was falling apart around them.

The NIV says **unfinished** but other translations say **not completed**. But neither are quite right: it means “**fulfilled**” or “**filled up**.” This is saying that work of the spirit was not full: they were not full of the work of Christ.

To Sardis, he says, “ You aren’t full of the spirit: you are dead and dying and everything is falling apart. You aren’t full of what **I’m doing** in Sardis.”

What do we do about this?

**3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

They should remember what they have seen and heard: the good news of Jesus Christ. The messenger carries the word of God: Jesus came and lived and taught and healed, performed

miracles, arrested, beaten, crucified, resurrected, appeared to 500 people, and rose. He is now King: **this is the good news. This is what they should be remembering. He is victorious: he is the one at work in the world around us.** Chew on this and remember what Jesus has done in your life

**Repent** means turning around, to go in one direction and **turn around and walk with Jesus.**

This is the way we walk into the works of God: *To be full of his spirit, repent, and follow him.*

**4** Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

When you offer a sacrifice **anywhere** in **any religion** at this time, you have to be **pure** and **clean**. If you're out with the sheep and you're dirty, you must clean yourself before you can offer a sacrifice in the Greek temples or the synagogues. If you are changing a diaper, you can't just put the baby down and offer a sacrifice, you have to clean up first.

**Soiled** in vs. 4 means soiled with GROSS, bodily functions. The Sardis church has a few people among them who haven't soiled their clothes. These people are worth walking with Jesus. Reality is that we remember and repent because we long to be animated and walk with Jesus as his children. *He cleans us and takes care of us.*

**Rev 12: 11** And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

He will never blot out the ones who are animated by His Spirit.

**6** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This is at end of **each** letter, but maybe particularly meaningful for Sardis:

As a parent, I tell my daughter often to listen to me. There is a difference between **hearing** someone and **listening**: if I hear the oven timer go off and do nothing, the cookies will burn. But if I hear and listen and do something, then I am truly listening. We are called to listen to the spirit: Whoever has ears. This means there is an action that accompanies this.

We live segmented lives: we appear to be something in one place and something else in another place. In some ways this is good: you should not act the same with your boss and your wife. But we have dead, dying places in our lives that we protect and guard and do not want to expose. If we are going to listen to the Spirit and be full of the work of Christ, cleaned and ready to walk with him, ***we have to reflect on repentance in these dying places.*** What are the things in my life that I don't want people to touch? It's OK if we talk about my love of sports or the royal coronation, but I don't want to talk about when I yelled at my kids yesterday. What is dead and dying? What is animated and alive? Where is the spirit at work in my life? What is he inviting you into with your co-workers, your kids, your neighbors? Where do you need to listen to what the Spirit is saying? Where do you need to repent and walk with Him?

This is hard for the church in Sardis: there wasn't a lot of good to talk about with this church. Let's look around and find what's alive and what's dead, what needs to be strengthened.