



# WEEK 5

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN SARDIS

## BE AUTHENTIC

The fifth church in our study of the seven churches of Revelation is Sardis. Sardis was located roughly 35 miles from Thyatira. It was a city of wealth known for its carpet industry and minting coins. It was also an area that was no stranger to regime change. Although it had impenetrable, solid walls, it was conquered by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. In AD 17, a severe earthquake struck, destroying the city. They became financially dependent on the Roman Empire for reconstruction, which meant that the Roman Empire gained even more control and influence over this area.

Like the other cities we've studied, Sardis had many pagan gods and cults, a strong Jewish presence, with the Christian church and believers stuck in the middle. Sardis was heavily polytheistic (worship of many gods) and had a thriving Jewish community. The Jewish community in Sardis had the most prominent ancient Jewish synagogue outside Palestine. There was incredible wealth and influence here, but this might be because of serious compromises the Jewish people in Sardis were making. There's evidence that the Jewish community in Sardis held Roman citizenship, which was incredibly rare. This means the Jewish community accommodated the pagan and Roman culture, and many believe that the Christian church in Sardis was guilty of this, too. This is why Jesus' rebuke for them is strongly focused on their lack of spiritual authenticity (Revelation 3:1, "...you have a reputation for being alive- but you are dead...").

This church was marked by its reputation of being in a wealthy city, and they became overconfident in their military strength. They weren't persecuted or enduring difficulty like the other churches we've studied so far. This led them to be full of pride in their standing. They boasted of being a thriving booming church, but Jesus tells them differently. The true condition of the church is that they are barely holding on, and they need to "Wake up...go back to what you heard and believed at first." This church needed a spiritual awakening.



## WEEK 5 SARDIS

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT SARDIS:

I know the works you are known for and your reputation, but that is not important to me. You are relying on the traditions of your past and forgetting about me in your present. You are blessed, but you are not using your blessings to honor and serve me. What you say and do inside your church doesn't ring true once you go out into the world. Live up to your reputation and be authentic. You are not being obedient to the Spirit, wake up!

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*The world is one single whole. It's holy. We divide it into areas marked out for God and areas marked out for ourselves. We call churches sacred and playgrounds secular. We have places where we pray and others where we play. But our compartments desecrate the way things are supposed to be; the earth is the Lord's. All of it. That is the holiness test: discovering the presence of the holy Christ and the movements of the Holy Spirit in these everyday faces we encounter in and out of church, playing and praying together through the whole life that Christ gives us so abundantly.*

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 3:1-6*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think defines a thriving/healthy church? What do you think defines a thriving/healthy Christian?

What do you think defines a church that needs an awakening? What do you think defines a Christian who needs an awakening?

### DEAD OR ALIVE

Too often churches measure spiritual health by numbers, buildings, and programs. But just because we have a lot of people coming to our churches doesn't mean we're being effective for the kingdom of God. We might be the popular place to be, but are we making disciples?

The people outside the church, and sadly enough also the people inside the church, might have been fooled by reputation and appearances, but Jesus knew the true condition of the church. Sardis was asleep, but their situation wasn't hopeless. Jesus told them to wake up and strengthen what was about to die. He called them to remember and repent.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 5

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| *Revelation 3:2-3, Matthew 24:42-43, Romans 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Revelation 16:15*

**REFLECTION:** What are the five things Jesus calls the church in Sardis to do in vv 2-3?

Which of these things seem to resonate with you the most personally? Why?

### KEEP WATCH

It's important to remember Sardis' history. It's a city known for its impenetrable walls, but it was conquered three times. That's because their walls looked unstoppable but were weak on the inside. They were wealthy people with many blessings, including a seemingly strong military. They were overconfident in their strength, so they weren't prepared for the enemy's attacks. The Persians made it through because they saw a soldier use a secret passage on one part of the wall. Later, the Persians retook this city when they saw an unprotected section of the wall.

As good and protected as this city looked on the outside, they were not as strong or protected on the inside. Jesus reminds the church of Sardis that they are following in this same history within the walls of their church. They are focused on their reputation, good works, and prosperity in the region, but they gained this favor because they compromised their beliefs to fit in with the community, the Pagan believers, and the government. In this letter, Jesus is calling the church in Sardis to wake up and return to what their mission is: to passionately equip and lead disciples for Jesus. He tells them to "Go back" or remember what they heard and believed about Jesus in the beginning. He's calling them to stay on mission, living for Christ and equipping others to do the same. If they do not, then like the history of Sardis, He will come to them when they least expect it and destroy them.



# WEEK 5

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## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 3:3, Psalm 105*

**REFLECTION:** Reflect on how you have seen and experienced God in your life and spiritual journey. List some moments and ways God has been faithful to you. Maybe it was through direction, deliverance from something, or blessings you have received.

### REMEMBER

A friend of mine recently shared something she heard from a pastor: "When you get hysterical, get historical." That phrase has stuck with me. Jesus is calling this church to "go back to what you heard"--in essence he is saying remember the goodness of the Lord. Psalm 105 is an excellent reminder of God's historical pattern of goodness. In this Psalm, we see how faithful God was to the Israelites throughout history. This idea of looking back and noticing God's goodness in collective history and in our own history is key to helping us in our current circumstances. If we can move forward with certainty that God is good, then we can trust him more fully and trust that His ways are better than ours. It helps us more easily repent of the ways that we try to take control of our own lives and allows us to more quickly turn back to Him as our ultimate authority. Looking back helps us remember that He is always for us and actively working for our good and His glory.

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 3:4, Hebrews 3:14, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:3-6*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think it means to walk with Jesus? When you are walking with someone, it indicates a deep connection. How can you make walking with Jesus a more familiar and natural practice in your life?

Take time to go on a walk with Christ. Maybe that is a literal walk outside where you focus on simply listening and talking to Him. Perhaps it's sitting in your favorite chair or driving to work in complete silence to hear and speak with Him but take time today to walk intentionally with Christ.

### WALK WITH ME

The Christians in Sardis who forsook the sinful compromise of their city would be rewarded with a closer, more intimate walk with Jesus. This reward is ultimately a better motivator than the fear of punishment or ruin from our sin. The pure can have greater intimacy with God not because they have earned it, but because they are simply more interested in the things of God. God promises to reward that interest: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

Written by David Guzik - *Enduring Word Revelation 3*

# WEEK 5

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 3:5, 1 John 3:1, Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:15*

**REFLECTION:** What does it mean that you belong to the Lord? How does this impact the way you see God and your life?

Write down the last part of Revelation 3:5, "I will announce before my Father and His angels that they are mine." Now write under that, "I am HIS." Take intentional time to pray and thank God for this truth. Specifically, ask Him to help you see yourself as a chosen child of God, adopted into His family, and to live as if that is true.

### ADOPTED INTO HIS FAMILY

The story of the Bible is the story of adoption. We are all adopted into God's spiritual family as chosen children of the Most High King. We are welcomed with open arms and feel the love of His family. In this way, the Bible directly uses adoption as a picture of what God has done for us. This adoption language would have had a deeper meaning for the Christians in that day. In the Roman world, adoption was a significant and common practice. If a man had no sons or felt that his sons were unworthy, he would have to adopt someone he thought would make a worthy son. A father could disown his natural-born son, but an adoption was irreversible and permanent.

Once adopted, the adoptee would have all his debts canceled, his crimes pardoned, and he would receive a new name. He would now be entitled to all the rights and benefits of a son. When we come to faith in Christ, we are adopted into the family of God. Our debts are canceled, our sins pardoned, and we are given a new name. We get to call God our "Abba Father" and we are given all the rights that heirs of a King are entitled to. We did nothing to deserve or earn these rights, but we get access to them because we are his beloved chosen children. This adoption into His family is not because we are worthy, but is all the more meaningful because God adopts us when we are completely unworthy.

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 3:1-6

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 5:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- What do you think it would look like for you to be authentic in your faith in Jesus?

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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*