



**Sardis: Church of the Living Dead
The Zombie Church
Revelation 3:1-6**

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Are zombies real?

You know, dead people who are alive with an unusual food choice? We really are beginning to see outbreaks of this around the world thanks to some of the drugs people are choosing to use these days. Dealers are using xylazine, a tranquilizer in veterinary medicine, as an add on with fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and some vape formulations. It is not approved for use with humans. "Overuse of the



drug can lead to rotting skin ulcerations and ultimately limb amputations if untreated, hence its horrifying nickname "zombie drug". (Thomson 2023)

But this is all relatively new, or so they say. The Bible though, tells us that we have had the living dead around with us for at least 2000 years now, perhaps longer. They typically show up as religious folks who have no relationship at all with the God of the universe. But they certainly want to school you and me on what it is that they do know. At least it seems that way.

Zombies were a problem in the northern kingdom of Israel as well as the southern kingdom of Judah. Amos, a prophet God sent to Israel, had to deal with one of them, Amaziah, who was a bogus pagan priest impersonating a real one in the worship center in Bethel. A classic example of a member of the living dead. It seems he was upset with Amos and flat out told him, since zombies hate to find out they are dead, to leave Bethel and no longer prophesy there.

Amos 7:16–17

“Now then, listen to this message from the LORD: “You say, ‘Don’t prophesy against Israel. Stop preaching against my people.’ But this is what the LORD says: ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in this city, and your sons and daughters will be killed. Your land will be divided up, and you yourself will die in a foreign land. And the people of Israel will certainly become captives in exile, far from their homeland.’ ” (NLT)

May the Lord bless the reading of His word. Seriously though, this condition we see in the scriptures continued like a disease.

During the time of the ministry of Jesus here on earth, zombies were found predominately in the Sanhedrin membership of the Temple. But, as we learn from the scriptures, some ventured out into the daylight and into various synagogues in the region and were members of zombie groups like the Sadducees or Pharisees.

Paul had to deal with the living dead over and over again on his missionary journeys and, unfortunately, as we see here in Revelation, some made it into the church there in Sardis. Here is the bad news, they are still in the church today.

We continue our trip through the seven churches and head off to our fifth stop, Sardis. To get there, as we leave Thyatira, we would head southeast for 30 to 40 miles. “Sardis was one of the most glorious cities in Asia, but much of its splendor lay in the past.” (Osborne 2002, 171)

The synagogue in Sardis was huge and could up to 1,000 worshippers at any given time and as far as we know, they were not persecuting the church. Hmm.

Sardis (sar'-dis) = Remnant; builders rule; escaping ones; those who come out; (idea of restoration). Red ones(?). (Smith and Cornwall 1998, 210)

In its early history, the King of Sardis who also ruled the Lydian Empire, was located at the top of the acropolis. Since there was only one approach to the city, it was felt to be impregnable, until Cyrus the Persian showed up. We learned about the need in the military for operational security from what took place. The official story.

The usual view is that Cyrus entered Sardis by the isthmus or neck on the south. That was the natural and necessary path in ordinary use; the only road and gateway were there; and inevitably the defence of the city was based on a careful guard and strong fortification at the solitary approach. The enemy was



expected to attack there; but the point of the tale is that the ascent was made on a side where no guard was ever stationed, because that side was believed to be inaccessible. (Ramsay 1904, 361)

The real story though is more interesting and is why I always spent time with the troops on post when I was in the military. They know everything.

“Now this is how Sardis was taken. When Croesus had been besieged for fourteen days, Cyrus sent horsemen about in his army to promise rewards to him who should first mount the wall. After this the army made an assault, but with no success. . . . So then it chanced that on the day before this Mardian, Hyroeades, had seen one of the Lydians descend by this part of the citadel after a helmet that had fallen down, and fetch it; he took note of this and considered it, and now he himself climbed up, and other Persians after him. Many ascended, and thus was Sardis taken and all the city like to be sacked. (Herodotus 1975, 105-107)

The city was taken just like a thief in the night would come in and steal via an unexpected route. And Cyrus was not the only one to do this, Antiochus the Great did the same thing 3 ½ centuries later.

Eventually, the city expanded onto the plain down below it, but it was living on borrowed time. “It is plain that the greatness of Sardis under the Roman rule was rooted in past history, not in present conditions. The acropolis ceased during that period to be the true city; it was inconvenient and useless; and it was doubtless regarded as a historical and archæological monument, rather than a really important part of the living city.” (Ramsay 1904, 367)

Today, the nearest town, Salikli, is five miles away and Sardis is a interesting historical site, but no longer a city.

The patron god of Sardis was Cybele and some of the temple remains exist there even today. “This city was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality.” (Guzik 2013, Rev 3:1a)

As John is writing this letter to the church there, this is a city in decline. Their glory days are long gone. A major earthquake in 17 AD means there was, in 90 AD, still visible debris to be seen even though the Emperor had donated a large sum to rebuild the city. But this is a city living in the past.

Their history is one that reflects a lack of discipline and a lack of paying attention to what is truly important.

One more thing to note about this church. There is no persecution going on here in Sardis, none. The church has offended no one and gets along with just about everyone. “Evidently most of the members were professing Christians, but not truly regenerate, and thus only going through the motions of religion.” (Morris 1983, 67) Alive, but dead. Zombies.

Before we get into the text, one more headline to be aware of, Jesus has nothing good to say to this church. With that, lets venture into the church of the living dead.

Revelation 3:1–6

““To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead. Be constantly alert, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with



Me in white, for they are worthy. The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NASB 2020)

This is the fifth church and as we look to church history, it is characteristic of the church period we call the reformation church. This is a picture of the protestant church from Oct 31, 1517, up to around 1800. It all begins with Martin Luther nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg Germany.

I, Martin Luther, Doctor, of the Order of Monks at Wittenberg, desire to testify publicly that certain propositions against pontifical indulgences, as they call them, have been put forth by me. Now although, up to the present time, neither this most celebrated and renowned school of ours, nor any civil or ecclesiastical power has condemned me, yet there are, as I hear, some men of headlong and audacious spirit, who dare to pronounce me a heretic, as though the matter had been thoroughly looked into and studied. But on my part, as I have often done before, so now too, I implore all men, by the faith of Christ, either to point out to me a better way, if such a way has been divinely revealed to any, or at least to submit their opinion to the judgment of God and of the Church. For I am neither so rash as to wish that my sole opinion should be preferred to that of all other men, nor so senseless as to be willing that the word of God should be made to give place to fables, devised by human reason. (Luther 1896, 422)

And with that conclusion, begins this new church age. Jesus gets right down to the problem in Sardis.

Revelation 3:1

““To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead.’” (NASB 2020)

This should be very clear, the one who is speaking to the church in Sardis, is the resurrected Jesus Christ. He is God and He is the one who is in charge of all of the churches. All of heaven is involved in the life of this church.

Jesus is the one who is in control of the Holy Spirit and He is the one who has sent the Spirit (John 14:116-17).

This is going to be an important thing for this church to remember and rely on as we move forward.

By Jesus starting the letter off this way, He is reminding them that it is His completed work on the cross that results in the Holy Spirit coming to indwell each believer.

If the church is unfamiliar with Jesus, then they are unfamiliar with the work of the Holy Spirit.

This church is in deep trouble. It is the resurrected Christ Himself who is writing to them.

“I know your deeds.” If you are looking for any hint of good news for this church, this left-handed way of saying some of what you are doing is ok is deeply overshadowed but all the other things that are problem in Sardis. Jesus tells them, “I know your deeds, you have a name.” Oops, this is not a strength at all. It is irony.

They have a name, and this is not a positive thing either.

ὄνομα - proper name of an entity, name. (Arndt, et al. 2000, 711)



Stop and think like a 1st Century Jew for a moment. Rather than pronounce the name of YAHWEH, they would instead say Hashem, "the name." This church does not have "the name" but they have a name and in the world of Greek philosophers, that could mean they have a reputation, but not "the name." They look like, but only look like, Christians.

"Name" in the sense of "repute" ... "to have a name," "to be known." (Bietenhard 1964-, 244)

They are claiming to be of Christ. They are claiming to be following and showing the path to life. This church believes they are representing Jesus Christ in all His glory and reflecting Him in their lives. But all they have, is "a name." A reputation. There is simply no reality here in the way that they live.

They are religious, but they are dead. There is no relationship. They claim to be alive, but Jesus says, nope, you are dead. They would say they are followers of Jesus Christ, redeemed, following the word. I mean look at the history here and what it is the reformation achieved after all. Dead, dead, dead.

History is always good to recall, what is it this dead church replaced. The Middle Ages church was doing one great work for the Lord after another. They were not satisfied with the status quo, they wanted more and more to take place in His name.

Now you have a group who is standing up to address the issues that came up in that age involving Jezebel, and they start off well but only address a few things and then start pointing back to what they started off with. Anyone who is reformed could provide the following to you and then challenge you with how much more they know about it than you.

The Five Solas

1. Sola scriptura: "Scripture alone"
 - a. A rejection of tradition and so-called Papal authority
 - b. An embrace of the scriptures and teaching in the language of the people
2. Sola fide: "Faith alone"
 - a. Salvation is a free gift to all who accept it by faith and cannot be earned
3. Sola gratia: "Grace alone"
 - a. The grace of God is the sole reason for salvation
4. Sola Christo: "Christ alone"
 - a. No intercessor required; Christ alone is the one providing access to the Father
5. Soli Deo gloria: "To the glory of God alone"
 - a. We live to Him alone. Not to please a human leader, not a list of rules, not to guard our own interests. We seek to glorify God and Him alone.

That is a pretty good start, but this reputation, this glorious history, just as with the history of Sardis, does not guarantee a vibrant spiritual life. You see, they did not go far enough.

Nothing about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer or church. Last things and prophecy were completely ignored as well. All things we see being further recovered today from what the early church believed.

The deadness being experienced in this church is tied, by Jesus, back to His being the one who sent the Holy Spirit. "Christ's self-description of this fifth message a reference to the adequacy of the life-giving Spirit to resolve the problem of the deadness of the Sardian church. Christ, the life-giver (cf. Rev. 1:18), imparts life through the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:2). In accord with the Holy Spirit's procession from the Son (cf. John 15:26), it is Christ's part to bestow or withhold the powers of the life-giving Spirit on which the life of



the church depends (cf. Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7–8) (Swete). His power is sufficient to meet every need, even to the point of restoring life to those about to die (Hemer).” (Thomas 1992, 245-246)

This church is not dead from the perspective that no one was involved in the church, but when you look at the close relationship the Jewish synagogue had with the world around it in Sardis, it appears the church may have taken the same approach.

To look at it in terms we would understand today, this church had multiple campuses, they had something going on every night of the week.

They were doing church, they had a large choir, big buildings, they looked like they were really booming.

To use some of the metrics I hear bantered about in church speak today, they had baptisms going on, good growth, good tithing, lots of folks coming, good attendance, and good market appeal with a sound brand, television, radio, podcasts, books...it was going on.

This is not your 1st Church of the Geriatrics with a revolving door Pastor fixing to resign to go to the next place.

But for all of what is going on, there is this problem. People are hearing what they want to hear and not too much more. We have a strong reformed tradition, great, but what have you done for Jesus lately.

The problem per Jesus – they were dead, He saw the church for what it really was. They were respected in the community and busy teaching what it is the people wanted to hear. No one was about the Great Commission in Sardis. No wonder no persecution.

I have a fishing story for you that reflects the scope of the problem with this church and a church age of dead religion. You see, it all began when Martin Luther nailed his fishing questions to a door. There were fish all around him in Germany and it seemed like no one was talking about the fish and the need to catch them. So, he led a group who began to call themselves fishermen. Alvin Reid tells us the rest.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fishermen.

Continually, they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. Further they said, “The fishing industry exists by fishing as fire exists by burning.” They loved slogans such as “Fishing is the task of every fisherman.” They sponsored special meetings called “Fishermen’s Campaigns” and “The Month for Fishermen to Fish.” They sponsored costly nationwide and worldwide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing such as the new fishing equipment, fish calls, and whether any new bait had been discovered.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called “Fishing Headquarters.” The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn’t do, however. They didn’t fish.

In addition to meeting regularly, they organized a board to send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. The board hired staffs and appointed committees and held many meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, and to decide what new streams should be thought about. But the staff and committee members did not fish.



Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers were built whose original and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Over the years courses were offered on the needs of fish, the nature of fish, where to find fish, the psychological reactions of fish, and how

to approach and feed fish. Those who taught had doctorates in “fishology,” but the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing. Year after year, after tedious training, many were graduated and were given fishing licenses. They were sent to do full-time fishing, some to distant waters which were filled with fish. Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish. But like the fishermen back home, they never fished. Like the fishermen back home, they engaged in all kinds of other occupations. They built power plants to pump water for fish and tractors to plow new waterways. They made all kinds of equipment to travel here and there to look at fish hatcheries. Some also said that they wanted to be part of the fishing party, but they felt called to furnish fishing equipment. Others felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen. Others felt that simply letting the fish know they were nice, land-loving neighbors and how loving and kind they were was enough.

After one stirring meeting on “The Necessity for Fishing,” one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fishermen’s General Board as a person having considerable experience.

Now it’s true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen’s clubs and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen yet never fished. They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”?

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don’t catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if, year after year, he never catches a fish? Is one following if he isn’t fishing? (Reid 1998, 5-7)

You see, if we as the church were busy about the business of the King, then we would not be looking at the culture and lamenting, we would be busy catching, cleaning, and then releasing fish back to the wild. That is our job after all. But for the church in Sardis, that was forgotten. They were simply going through the motions. And all those folks who were filling up the church in Sardis, since they were dead spiritually, all they did was stink up the place and add to the lie the church was supporting.

The dead church of Sardis continues to be dead today. There are whole denominations now, infected with the disease.

I seldom meet a man or woman who is not religious, who does not profess to be a Christian, but I seldom meet anyone who is committed to Christ! For the most part, even in our most orthodox churches, I see nothing but deadness. The meetings for worship are poorly attended. The people, it is obvious, seldom read, much less study, the Scriptures. Prayer appears, usually, to be the stating of words (accurate enough), but not the pleading of burdened hearts. The worship of Christ, for the vast majority of those who profess faith in him, is a convenience, not a necessity. I fear that ‘Ichabod’ might be written on the doors of most of our church buildings. (Fortner 2002, 135)

Revelation 3:2

“Be constantly alert, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.” (NASB 2020)



Doctor Jesus provides the cure for those who have drifted off into dead religion. First of all, stop being so careless about who and what you choose to listen to. Christian radio and television are great and a means for reaching millions with the gospel. It is all a means being used by wolves in sheep's clothing to fleece the flock and lead countless thousands straight to hell.

We have been called to be alert, remember what it was you heard when you were first saved and commit anew to that. But in many churches today, if you stand for a Biblical worldview, then you will be condemning some in the congregation who either practice unbiblical activities, or those who are busy affirming those same activities.

Everyone is not right. No, we really cannot all come together in one big room, sing kumbaya and head off into Monday. There is truth and there are lies. In many places today, if you assert the truth, you are labeled a hater and a bigot. You have used, to quote a major denomination, triggering unloving speech.

We must be aware of pronouns you know. I was recently asked to be involved in the National Day of Prayer and be just one more person on the stage praying what an unbeliever has assigned to be prayed. I declined. I really did not have time, but the more I consider what I was being asked to do, I would have been holding hands with and affirming those others who do not teach the gospel at all but are leading folks straight to hell in the name of religion. I have an announcement; God's pronouns are not they/them. He is the creator of everything, but Sardis would have us just get along.

Jesus flat out says the work this church started with, did not go far enough. Everything else is about to die. The must wake up, like the guards of the city, and watch out. The call from Jesus to this church is interesting and amazing at the same time.

Revelation 3:3

"So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you." (NASB 2020)

Why does Jesus have to remind this church that He is coming back? Because one of the things the reformed church missed, was last things.

The church of the reformation was not a return to the apostolic church. Not even close. They still held to things which had been misinterpreted by the previous church. As a result, you see things like Replacement Theology, Antisemitism, Preterism, and a complete rejection of the rapture of the church and the coming rule and reign of Jesus. Allegory becomes the thing, and manmade rules. Deja vu.

Protestantism, as a whole, has turned away from looking for the coming of Jesus Christ, and they have built up these systems that certain things must be fulfilled before He can come. (McGee 1997, 913)

The two times Sardis was conquered, it was at night and totally unexpected. Not a very good history to have. Jesus points out to the church there, because of their spiritual state, they are staring down it happening to them one more time.

The rapture of the church will indeed take whole denominations by surprise, since they are not looking for it to happen anytime soon, or even at all. When you have compromised with the world and are simply trying to get along, that means you have emotionally invested in the world, and you are not all that interested in leaving. But there are those in Sardis, not many, but some who do believe.

That is an amazing thing to be saying about a church. Normally you would expect a church to be filled with saved people. But this is not a normal church. They started off well but did not go far enough. Their desire to get along meant that they not only compromised with the world, but they also compromised with



the church they disagreed with and still embraced things from that church, even if they came from Jezebel.

Most are not saved. There are notable exceptions and great men of God who did mighty works for the Lord. But John Wesley would be so disappointed today.

John Bunyan would probably be canceled today. “Within this dead church of unbelievers, a few true Christians were scattered like flowers in a desert. There were not enough of them, however, to change Christ’s overall evaluation of the church as dead. “ (MacArthur 2007, 83)

But God did indeed remember them. He had a remnant even in a dead church like Sardis. These are the saved ones who will walk with the Lord in white. These are those who are overcomers.

Revelation 3:4–6

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NASB 2020)

What must be done in this church?

1. Wake up.
2. Strengthen those things which remain.
3. Remember what they had been taught getting back to the Bible.
4. Keep what the Bible teaches.
5. Repent.

For those who do so, they are qualified as overcomers. They will walk in white with Jesus, wear white returning with Him at the end of the age and wear white at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Not only, as believers, are we guaranteed to have our names in the book of life, but Jesus Himself affirm we belong to Him, by name, to the Father and the heavenly host.

So here is the question, did the church in Sardis repent and return? Yes, they did. We know this because of a man named Melito, he was the bishop of Sardis in the last part of the 2nd century. He wrote a letter to two Roman Emperors explaining the faith to them.

To these events Melito bears testimony, who was then bishop of Sardis, and well known at that time. This is clear from what he has said in that most excellent defence of our faith which he wrote and addressed to the emperor Verus. (Valesius 1847, 157)

How are you doing on this? Do you have a relationship with Jesus or are you simply checking boxes and looking like something is going on with the Lord, but nothing really is. Most of Sardis was checking boxes. Why not stop looking like a believer, and instead, become one for real?

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)



Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

ABC's of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.

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