

• *Sardis – a call to spiritual reality*

No two churches are exactly the same. Every congregation needs a different word from the Lord Jesus Christ. One might need a word about lost love. Another needs a call to stand strong in the midst of suffering. Yet another needs to be told to hold firm to the truth of God's gospel or to stand strong against temptations to a message that encourages sin. In the case of the church at Sardis, they needed a call to spiritual reality.

1. *Churches face the danger of losing a real and living contact with God (iii) & (iv)*

• *Famous for being lively*

• *But now it was dead*

• *Noise and activity but the reality of the Holy Spirit missing*

1. **Churches face the danger of losing a real and living contact with God.** Again (i) Jesus demands that a letter should be sent to one of his churches. He says: ¹*'To the angel of the church in Sardis write: The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works.'* (ii) Again he gives a description of himself, taken from the vision of the glory of Christ which John was seeing. (iii) His word of criticism comes next. *'You have a name of being alive, but you are dead.'* It seems that the church at Sardis was famous for being a strong and lively church. No doubt it had been a lively church at an early stage of its existence. But now it was dead – says Jesus. It is a terrible and severe description – a dead church! What is a dead church like? Its worship is lacking in 'anointing'. There may be a lot of noise and a lot of skilful musicianship but there will be something missing – the sense of reality that only comes by the Holy Spirit. There might be large crowds but there will be no piercing of the heart by the power of the word of God. After the 'meeting' is over, much of what has happened will be forgotten. It has no long-lasting impact. The machinery of a lively church can be kept going for a long time when the liveliness of the Holy Spirit has gone. Their reputation might continue but the reality will be different.

2. *Yet as long as Jesus can speak to us the situation is not entirely hopeless (v)*

• *They must act fast*

2. **Yet as long as Jesus can speak to us the situation is not hopeless.** The situation in Sardis was not utterly hopeless because Jesus was still speaking to the church! By the Spirit. Jesus has something to say: ²*'Become wakeful, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death. For I have not found your works brought to completion in the sight of my God.'* ³*'Remember then what you received and heard; keep it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.'* They are in a dangerous situation but it is not entirely hopeless. They must act fast. Soon Jesus will decide they are not going to change and will abandon that congregation. The atmosphere of death will come down upon it totally. There are still people who are able to wake up and act for God. Jesus says: ⁴*'Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.'*

3. *(v) continued*

(1) *Wake up!*

3. **So Jesus has the answer for them.** There are five things he tells them they must do.

Wake up! The trouble with all of us is that we become spiritually sleepy without knowing it. This congregation at Sardis did not realize that it had spiritually fallen asleep. Everything seemed to be as normal. A person who is asleep does not know exactly what is

happening around him. A person who is asleep does not always like to be woken up. But the people at Sardis need to realize that something has happened to them and they need to recover.

(2) *Strengthen what remains!*

Strengthen what remains! The situation is not entirely hopeless. They can pray. They can spend time listening to God. They can find out what God wants them to do. If they will draw near to God, God will draw near to them.

(3) *Remember!*

Remember! If they think, they will realize that they have known better days, and God does not want them to be going backwards. The spiritual reality they knew before, they may know again. They can recover if they will seek God. They must remember 'how' they received blessings from God. What was the way they knew him so well before?

(4) *Persist*

Persist! Jesus says: 'Remember then what you received and heard; **keep** it . . . ' It is not enough just to hear God's voice once. We must hold on to what God says to us and carry it through to full obedience. We must persist **after** God has spoken to us.

(5) *Repent!*

Repent! The word means basically 'change your mind'. 'Do an about-turn in your thinking and in your entire attitude. Be ready for a different way of living altogether.'

If they will respond to the Lord Jesus Christ, he will reward them. They will become his special companions. 'They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy'¹. There are special promises to those who conquer. ⁵'The person who overcomes will be clothed in white robes, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.' The 'white robes' are the visible reward for having lived for God. Ultimately the white robes are the shining glory of the resurrection body. But a foretaste comes even now, for such people experience 'the power of the resurrection' even now. Our name stays in the book of life; that means we are destined for high honour and reward. Jesus talks to the Father about us – with the angels listening – to bring us into all that he plans for us. ⁶'Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

1 3:4

• *Special promise – white robes (vii) – ultimately a glorious resurrection body*

• *Appeal to be heard (vi)*

 <p>slices.org.uk</p>	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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