



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Revelation 3.1-6

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I. Introduction to this Study

So far in the series entitled God's Blogs we have seen four letters to four churches in Asia Minor. Each of those letters convey the words of the risen Jesus who speaks words of commendation and exhortation to those churches. Each of the churches - Ephesus, Pergamum, Smyrna, and Thyatira - faced unique challenges, persecution by those who oppose Jesus, and internal threats of false teachers and misguided leaders.

This week we look at the letter to the church in Sardis situated in a city known for its wealth, complacency, and decadence. In Sardis, we find a church that has assimilated much of the cultural values of the city it is living in. The risen Lord has some harsh words for this church and issues a stern warning to it. Because of the similarities we see in our church today, this is a message that invites us to make some important decisions.

II. Connecting with One Another

What has been one of the most difficult decisions you have had to make? What are some of the factors you consider when making important decisions?

III. Study the Text

- a. Begin by reading through Revelation 3.1-6.
- b. Sardis was an important city in Asia Minor. It was a place of great wealth due to the surrounding regions of rich pastureland that fostered a significant textile industry. Woolen fabrics and expensive dyes were the economic mainstays of Sardis. Historians cite the wealth of the city that literally flowed into it from springs beneath Mount Tmolus, a sharply rising hill that towered over the city. Not only was this the location of a large fortress that offered protection and security to the city, it was the source of gold dust that flowed into the city. That gold was minted into the first coins - the forerunner of our modern money. Given its great wealth and the security of Mount Tmolus how do you picture life in Sardis?
- c. If you imagined life to be comfortable, easy, and luxuriant, you would be correct. However, its prosperity and ease led to what one author describes as "voluptuous decadence." Look at verses 1-3. Compare these verses to the opening verses of the letters to the other four churches preceding this. What element is missing here in 3.1-3 that is found in the others?
- d. If you recognized that Jesus does not commend the Sardisian church you are correct. What does the lack of any commendation suggest? Do you think Jesus would find things in Good Shepherd to commend us for?

- e. Twice in the history of Sardis the great fortress situated Mount Tmolus was captured by enemies - in 549 B.C. by the Babylonians and in 218 B.C. by Antiochus and the Roman Army. In both instances the fortress was captured by stealth - soldiers quietly scaling the steep cliffs at night only to find an unguarded fortress and easily taking it and the city of Sardis. How does this make the words of Jesus - "Wake up!" or "be alert" - more profound? What does his statement "you have the reputation of being alive but are dead" suggest? How can a church look alive outwardly but inwardly be spiritually dead? Are there ways in which we at Good Shepherd need to heed this call to "wake up?" What is our reputation (that's how other people see us and deem us to be)? How do you think Jesus deems us to be?
- f. Take a look at John 15.1-11. Compare this to Revelation 3.3. What steps does the church in Sardis need to take in order to "repent" and complete what is incomplete? How can they move from their smug complacency to a new and real connection with Jesus? How does a person "re-connect" to Jesus?
- g. Revelation 3.4-6 employs a new metaphor of unsoiled clothing. White robes signify moral and spiritual purity. Pagan religions considered approaching the gods with soiled clothing as sacrilegious. In this metaphor, how does one's clothing become soiled? How can the surrounding culture and its values "soil" the purity of followers of Jesus?
- h. Look at Romans 12.2. How does Paul's admonition to not be conformed to the world (its values and priorities and behaviors) relate to the words of Jesus in Revelation 3.4-6?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Take some time to reflect on your relationship with God. Are you truly connected to Jesus like a branch is connected to the vine or limb from which it draws its life? What steps might you take to be more connected or re-connected to Jesus?
- b. How can you encourage others to connect with Jesus?
- c. Reflect on the media influences in your life. What things are causing you to "soil your clothing" with the values and priorities of the culture that is opposed to God?
- d. Would you consider a "fast" from the influences that are not helping you be closely connected to Jesus Christ - TV, movies, popular music, talk shows, other? Then to focus on God's word as your source of values and priorities.

V. Pray

- a. Pray for yourself and for the Good Shepherd congregation to be truly connected to Jesus and focused on earning his commendation for trusting and living in him.
- b. Pray for the on-going process of affiliation with ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, and how this will enhance our ability to help others know Jesus and become his disciples.
- c. Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus, that he is truly a living Lord who continues to guide and empower his people and whose kingdom rule is present in the world today.