

**It's Time to Wake Up**  
**Revelation 3:1-6**  
**#6 in a Series from the Book of Revelation**  
**Faith Community Church, September 2, 2007**

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**Introduction**

Every summer when I was a kid my parents packed us up and took us camping. Our destination was usually northern New York state and Canada, or New England. Sometimes we'd reach our destination in a day's travel, and stay at a nice state park, and other times we'd stop for a night or two to break up the trip.

One summer my father had decided that we would spend a night at a particular campground in upper New York State. He had chosen the spot after looking at some brochures he had received, and the one for this campground described spacious campsites with quality fireplaces, and recreation including swimming and boating under the watchful eye of a lifeguard, and tennis courts. Sounded like a nice place to stay.

It's been over 40 years, but I will never forget pulling in to that campground. We piled out of the car and stood looking around, almost dumbstruck. The campsites were in a lumpy uneven field. You couldn't tell where one ended and the next one began. The fireplaces were cinderblocks loosely piled to form three sides. The swimming area was a dark, muddy pond, no bigger than this auditorium. On the far side of that quality swimming area, tied to a stick, was a rubber boat. On the near side was the lifeguard stand – a kitchen stool that stood lopsided, with one leg sinking into the mud. The tennis court was a badminton net (sagging badly in the middle) on an uneven part of the field. There wasn't a person in sight. My father burst out laughing, we got back in the car and headed elsewhere.

We are pretty well almost used to the fact things are not as they are represented:

- Some of you have looked for homes, read the descriptions and then visited, only to find that what you read and what you saw don't seem to be the same house, but you knew that would be true before you saw the house.
- You buy a car advertised to get 28 miles per gallon knowing full well that you'll be lucky if you get 18.
- A cleaning product promising to remove all stains doesn't work.
- And who hasn't been to a funeral where you wonder if you're in the right room because the person who died was nowhere near as nice as the eulogy implies.

Descriptions can be very different from reality. That was true of the church in Sardis as we will see this morning, and it requires us to ask the question: is that also true of our church, or of us as individual Christians. Are we comfortable not being what we ought to be? Not measuring up to what is expected?

## **The Church In Sardis**

As we've looked at these different letters I've not gone over every detail in each church's situation, simply because of time. But in some cases, and especially in this passage, there are characteristics of the city that are used to make the point of the letter more vivid.

Two are worth noting:

First, Sardis had enjoyed the reputation of being a prominent city. But in AD 17 it had been destroyed by an earthquake, and while it was rebuilt, it was no longer the city it had once been.

Second, Sardis had been viewed as a city with defenses that could not be penetrated. But on at least two occasions the city had been captured, once because one man snuck in at night and opened the gate for the attacking army, and another when twelve men managed to go over the wall and provide access to the army. It happened suddenly and unexpectedly.

What can we learn about the church at Sardis?

1. The church had a reputation of being alive, but in reality it was dead or nearly so. Like the city, it was living off of its past reputation. It had started well, but in God's sight the works of the church were not complete.
2. As a result, Jesus tells them that they had better wake up and make things right, or else he would come against them suddenly and unexpectedly in judgment, words that would remind the people of the way the city had been conquered in the past.
3. To the few who remained in Sardis who had been faithful – and would remain so – Jesus promises eternal fellowship. By implication, those who have claimed to be his followers but have not remained faithful and do not wake up face being removed from the book of life.

Now this is not an easy message. But will we let our lives be challenged and will we allow God to diagnose the condition of our hearts and lives so that we do not fall into the same failure that they fell into? Let me ask some questions so that we can find ourselves in this passage:

### **How Do We Apply This Letter to Our Lives?**

1. By seeing where we fit in.

There are three kinds of people in this passage.

- One group is clearly identified in verse 4 – they are people who (to use Jesus' word picture) are alive and awake. These are people who are truly Christians. They are not perfect, they may have taken two steps forward and one back, but they have – by their works – shown that what they have professed to be is a reality.

- The other two kinds of people are – for the sake of Jesus’ rebuke – lumped together in one group. Jesus surveys the church and he sees what looks like death. But here and there are people who are not really dead but are just sleeping (again, using Jesus’ metaphor).

How can we tell which best represents us?

Those who are awake & alive (to use Jesus’ metaphor) will show signs of life. They have made a profession of faith that is backed up by certain indicators that real life is present. See 1 Peter 2:1-3 & 2 Peter 1:3-11, for example. Their assurance is not based on their profession – that is never the basis of assurance in the Bible. It is based on the fact that Christ has been changing them. They are not perfect – in fact the journey can be pretty rocky – but there is progress in those areas that God says are indicators of life.

There are those who appear to be dead but are really asleep. They have known some of what real life was, but it is past history.

How does that happen? It can happen through sin, or by being overcome by the culture, or even by the failure of a community of believers to provide adequate nurture there is no present sign of growth. Ultimately they do hear the words of Christ and they awake. But do not be fooled here – this is the most precarious of places to be. This is not a person who says, “I’m a Christian and someday I’ll get my act together.” This is a person who when confronted by the rebuke of Christ says, “I’m not where I ought to be but I will by God’s grace change my ways.”

There are those – even in the church – who are simply spiritually dead. Maybe they enjoy the warmth of the fire. But there is no evidence of real life and never has been.

May I offer a few parenthetical words of counsel? Our popular understanding of Christianity finds some of its roots in the frontier revivalists of the 1800’s – men who focused on emotion and outward response. Out of this movement came what we know as inviting people forward and praying a prayer or making a decision to receive Jesus. The problem with those things is that while they were viewed as helpful at eliciting a response, they quickly became indicators of whether or not a person was a Christian. So the basis for assurance – again in our popular understanding of Christianity – is that if you did “A” then “B” is the result. If you went forward, prayed a prayer, raised your hand, signed a pledge card – whatever method is used – *that* is the indicator that you are a Christian. But there is absolutely no basis for that in the Bible. And you need to understand that because in any church – even in this one – it is likely that there are people who have never shown any signs of real life, but they give themselves false comfort – or have false comfort given to them by others – because of some action that they took, and not because they have repented of their sin, trusted Christ and followed him.

A friend of mine tells about the time that he was contacted by the father of a young man who had died suddenly – I believe it was in an accident of some kind. He asked the father what he thought about his son’s spiritual condition, and the father said that while his son had been brought up in the church and knew much, he didn’t feel that his life

gave any evidence that he had been truly converted. And so my friend shared the Gospel at this funeral, and particularly challenged people who had played with Christianity but never really embraced it. After the message a time was given for people to share remembrances and one dear lady stood and said that she had taught that young man in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and she was glad to be able to say that he was in heaven because he had prayed a prayer with her in that Sunday School class.

Some of us may say, “Whew – at least someone knew that he had prayed a prayer or made a decision.” But that is never what the Bible holds out as reason for assurance. All that does – and all this lady’s well-intentioned, but biblically ignorant words did – was to provide a false sense of hope.

The question I need to ask – because I love you and care for you – is that if you are not clearly following Christ, or your kids are not following Christ, is it possible that the real problem is that there has never been any life there in the first place?

So what do we do?

2. We need to listen to Jesus’ words.

*If you’re awake – you are not be perfect but you can see evidence of growth in your life.* Stay awake. Remain faithful and obedient. Fix your eyes on the promise of fellowship with Christ and, as Jesus told the church at Thyatira, “hold fast to what you have until I come” (2:25).

*If you’ve known a relationship with Christ, but it is past history.* To you Jesus says, “Wake up.” What that means is pretty clear. He tells you to remember what you received and heard and keep (or obey) it. Ultimately our ability to make spiritual progress is related to our exposure to the word of God and the opportunity we give the Holy Spirit to use it in our lives. Please see that! The road to spiritual recovery is in repentance, not experience! It is in acting, not feeling.

*If you’ve really never known a relationship with Christ – not even sure you know what that is.* This is not just for the person who comes from “the outside” and doesn’t know much about Christianity. This is also for the person who has lived comfortably inside the circle of the church, but has never been made alive. You may consider yourself to be a Christian, but deep down you know that you’re not. To you the call of Christ is to repent of your sin and embrace God’s offer of forgiveness by trusting in Christ and in Christ alone as your savior. God will make you alive, he will forgive you, and he will change you.

## **Conclusion**

No matter where you fit here, Jesus has something to say to you. Are you listening? Will you respond?