

Session Twelve:

Revelation 3:1-6 The Church Of Sardis

I) History Of Sardis

- A) According to the Greeks the city of Sardis was once among the greatest cities of its Day. History records this city under several different names reached its peak around 700 B.C. and from there was on a steady decline.
- B) Within Sardis there was a tiny Citadel which became a wartime refuge for people who lived below as it was much safer up higher. But now, most of what was formally Sardis has fallen off the Cliff due to erosion. Sardis throughout history has suffered several earthquakes with a major one in 17 A.D. some describing as the greatest disaster in human memory.
- C) In the streams and rivers that flowed through Sardis it was said there was gold dust and this is attested as fact not fiction throughout history that Sardis was a wealthy city. So much so, that after the large earthquake of 17 A.D. the city was rebuilt in less than 9 years.
- D) The culture of pagan gods in the city was typical of its geographic location having both emperor worship and local and regional deities.
- E) It's clear that there was time when the Church of Sardis loved Jesus but at the time of the letter their outward devotion to others wasn't matched by their inward devotion to Jesus. The Church in the city wasn't suffering outside persecution (**Smyrna**) or inward heresy (**Pergamos/Thyatira**), but had become complacent in their spiritual state. It seems that spiritual poverty and compliancy were leading the Church into moral error.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

- A) **Revelation 3:1** *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars; I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but are dead."*
 - 1) Jesus' again **Addresses** the human leadership of the Church in the same way that He has the other four Churches.
 - 2) After the Address Jesus gives the **Attributes** of Himself that are specific to the Church of Sardis and what they were facing.
 - 3) To the Church of Sardis Jesus reveals two facets of Himself by saying *"...these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..."*
 - 1. **He who has the Seven Spirits of God (Rev. 1:4)** = This is a reference not to seven different Spirits of God, but the Sevenfold Spirit of God. **Isaiah 11:2**;
 - (a) **(1)** The spirit of the Lord **(2)** Spirit of wisdom **(3)** Spirit of understanding **(4)** Spirit of counsel **(5)** The Spirit of might **(6)** The Spirit of knowledge **(7)** The Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

- (b) Jesus is making it clear to a Church that barely hanging in there and ready to die, that He possess all that's needed to turn things around in Sardis. He has the fullness of the Holy Spirit ready to help them.
2. He who has the seven stars (Rev. 1:16, 20) = These seven stars are clarified in **Revelation 1:20** as being the human overseers/messengers of the Churches.
 3. Jesus is telling this Church that though they are separated from Him, He's not separated from them, though they have forgotten Him, He hasn't forgotten them. He's holding them in the power of His right hand in tenderness.
 4. This also speaks to Jesus concern about what kind of messenger they were becoming. Jesus doesn't just care about the work getting done, but He also cares about the kind of worker that's working.
- 4) The Church of Sardis as a whole like the Church of Laodicea receives no words of **Approval** from Jesus.
- 5) Jesus says to the Church in His **Accusation** against them **"...I know your works, that you have a name you are alive, but you are dead (or dead on the inside)."**
1. Jesus is saying to them *"Your works might be passing before others (you have a name that you are alive—reputation) but you're not fooling Me. I have the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, and it's clear to Me that you're dead on the inside."*
 2. It's clear from Jesus' words that the Church of Sardis was known by others for doing great but according to Jesus, they were dead, like a corpse internally (Greek word #3498). This was the crisis of 3 of the seven Churches (Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea).
 3. Because Jesus is the Faithful Witness, He always tells us the truth, regardless of what others say about us. Beloved, we must talk to the Spirit and ask Him what Jesus thinks about us. Do assume, get clarity about your life.
- B) **Revelation 3:2** **"Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God."**
- 1) Jesus moves from His Accusation of them to His **Advice** for them.
 1. The idea of watching and being watchful here isn't mainly about waiting for the Lord's return, but about being sober, alert and steadfast in the midst of a Church who's fallen asleep. The word watch and watchful is Greek word # 1127 and it means to *perceive, take heed, recover full vision and to see clearly.*
 2. The Church of Sardis had been in the past what Ephesus was in the present, a thriving city filled with the life of God, but apart from their repentance, Jesus is letting them know that the ministry is at the point of death.
 3. The idea that their works weren't **"perfect"** simply means they were inadequate, incomplete or lacking. They were immature as opposed to mature.

- C) **Revelation 3:3** *"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."*
- 1) Jesus continues His **Advice** to them by calling them to remember and repent. They are exhorted to remember the start of their love relationship with Him, and from there, hold fast what they first received. Because God doesn't forget, He calls us to remember!
 - 2) Most people see this verse primarily a second coming passage. I see it primarily having to do with the Church of Sardis and secondarily about the second coming.
 1. The coming of Jesus to this Church was a coming of Judgment, or a day of reckoning with those in the Church. He's telling them that He's coming to them, so repent, remember and return so that I don't have to destroy that which I love, the ministry.
 2. But what Jesus says is a principle that's also true of His second coming.
 - (a) *"...Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."*
 3. Jesus doesn't intend for the Church to be caught off guard by the season of His return or the moment of His return. To the praying, sober and alert Church, His return won't be sudden and like a thief. But those who refuse to watch will experience it like a thief in the night.
 - (a) **1st Thessalonians 5:1-6** *"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, Peace and safety! then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."*
 4. In both passages the Bible is telling us that those who refuse to watch will experience His coming to them like a thief in the night.
- D) **Revelation 3:4** *"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy."*
- 1) Jesus moves from His Advice for them with His **Assurance** of reward to them, if they overcome.
 1. It's clear that the entire Church wasn't disconnected from Jesus, but most and that only left a few that weren't in the same place of judgment. Jesus is turning from the unworthy majority to the worthy few.
 2. Jesus first addressed their name as their reputation (**Rev. 3:1**) but now uses names to speak of a few individuals among the majority.

3. The rewards listed in this verse and the following verse aren't automatic just because they are Christians. These promises are only invitations until we respond to them. God's promises are contingent upon our response to them and Him. Without the proper heart response to those promised rewards they remain only invitations and not guarantees.
 4. It seems that the white garments are speaking of walking with Christ in victory during the 1,000 year reign and beyond. During the Roman era it was common during holidays and celebrations and specifically around a great triumph to wear a white Toga. And to a struggling Church and weak city, the promise of victory would have been sweet.
- E) **Revelation 3:5** *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."*
- 1) Again, the **Assurance** of eternal reward is connected to them overcoming the lethargy of the majority and to become reconnected with Jesus at the heart level.
 - 2) Jesus also lets the Church of Sardis know that if they don't repent and return to Him, He is willing to blot out their name from the Book of Life.
 1. Jesus is clarifying to us that though our name was once written in the Book of Life (Salvation) it can be removed. Those that don't overcome in victory are in danger of having their names literally scrapped off the parchments with a knife.
 2. Blot is Greek word # 1813 and it literally means to smear out, to obliterate, erase, tear, blot out or wipe away.
 - (a) **2nd Thessalonians 2:3** *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed..."*
 3. Jesus was saying to them "in the same way a civic register contained the names of the citizens so also does God have a book that has the names of the citizens of heaven (**Ex. 32:31-32; Phi 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 21:27**).
 4. Because of the compromise of the Church in the city, it was hard to preach the truth of Jesus straightforward. So Jesus promised them, if they will be faithful to preach His name to others, He will also preach of speak their name to His Father.
- F) **Revelation 3:6** *"He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*
- 1) From the Assurance of eternal reward to those who overcome Jesus issues the final **Appeal** to the Church of Sardis.
 - 2) In great tenderness, not wishing to punish His people, **Appeals** to them to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and press into the message in way that they have never done before.