

A SERIES THROUGH THE REVELATION

SARDIS: DYNAMIC BUT DYING | 2.3.22

I. THE CITY OF SARDIS (Rev. 3:1-6)

- A. According to the Greeks, Sardis was acclaimed as one of the great cities of its day. Around 700 B.C. this city was said to have climaxed, and in the years following it went into a steady decline. It was located about 33 miles south of Thyatira. A large part of the upper city was located 1,500 feet above the valley below, which made it defensible but also limited their growth as a city due to the lack of space.
- B. Although the city was said to be unreachable by an enemy it was overtaken twice. Once in 549 B.C. and again in 195 B.C. Because of the location of the city, Sardis is quoted as saying, *"It's so easy to defend, even a child could do it."* Both times it was invaded and overtaken, the watchmen atop the 1,500 acropolis had fallen asleep.
- C. Around 17 A.D. Sardis also suffered a massive earthquake that some have described as the greatest disaster in human memory. Through a generous donation the city was rebuilt in just 9 years. From what others have gathered the religious climate within the city was a mixture of worship to local deities alongside typical emperor worship that was taking place throughout the whole of Asia. *But it's not very notable for them.*
- D. At the time of Jesus' address, Sardis wasn't living in its glory, but what was left. The church wasn't under heavy persecution or boasting about their wealth, they seem to be simply indifferent towards the Lamb. They were well thought of by many, but not by Christ. It's possible that their difficult past created a people who wanted peace in society. To the Church of Sardis, Jesus finds nothing commendable in their midst (WHOA).

II. THE CHURCH OF SARDIS (Rev. 3:1-6)

- A. **Revelation 3:1a** *"And to the angel of the Church of Sardis write, these things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..."*
 - 1. Jesus once again gives the ADDRESS to the overseers of the ministry, as they are the primary ones responsible for the state of the Church. Each individual has personal responsibility for his or her life in Christ, but the leadership of a Church sets the spiritual thermostat for the people within the Church. Not all will rise to where the leadership sets it, but most will.
 - 2. To the Church of Sardis, Jesus reveals two distinct ATTRIBUTES of Himself that speak to the Church's specific challenges and issues.
 - 3. These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God = Jesus isn't talking about seven Holy Spirits, but the seven-fold Spirit of God. It's a statement declaring that the fullness of the Holy Spirit resides in Christ.
 - a. Jesus possesses everything needed to turn this ministry around. It would take the fullness of God to lift them from a place of indifference and slumber and make them again, alive internally, not just externally.
 - 1. **Isaiah 11:2** *"...The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him...Spirit of wisdom...understanding...Spirit of counsel...might...Spirit of Knowledge...the fear of the Lord."*
 - 2. **John 3:34** *"For He (Christ) whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."*
 - 3. **Colossians 1:19** *"For it pleased the Father that in Him (Christ) all the fullness should dwell..."*

4. He who has the seven stars = Jesus is declaring over the ministry that He is the head of the Church and those within the Church. Though they have been unfaithful to Him, He hasn't been unfaithful to them. There's still hope.
 - a. Jesus isn't only concerned about work getting done; He's also concerned about the quality of the worker who's working. *Jesus cares about both the worker, and the work.*

B. Revelation 3:2b "...I know your works, that you have a name that you're alive, but you are dead."

1. With nothing positive to AFFIRM in the ministry, Jesus moves straight into His ACCUSATION against them.
2. You have a name that you're alive, but you are dead = Sardis had made peace with their culture to the exclusion of preaching Christ and calling others into repentance. The offense of the Cross had ceased to exist through their preaching. A.W. Tozer said, *"the cross that slays me, is the cross that saves me."*
3. The scary thing about this ministry, and 2 others mentioned in **Revelation 2-3** (Ephesus, Laodicea), is that they are doing ministry, impacting others, but unaware of how Jesus feels about them.
4. Friends, our life in Christ isn't static, like a portrait. It's living, and active. It's either trending towards nearness with Him, or it's trending towards separation from Him, but it's never idle.
 - a. Though Sardis was fooling others outside the Church they weren't fooling Christ inside the Church. The One who possesses the fullness of the Spirit knows and sees everything, rightly (**Song of Songs 5:10-16**).

C. Revelation 3:2-3 "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die for I have not found your works perfect before God. 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. The only ADVICE that Jesus has for a sleeping, complacent, and indifferent Church is to wake up; not for a moment but as a way of life. This isn't about revival meetings, but a revived life.
 2. This Church was sleeping the sleep of death, and if not roused, if not shaken, if not called out of slumber, their spiritual death and separation from Christ on the inside, would give way to death and separation on the outside.
 3. The deadness of verse 1 isn't absolute, but apart from responding to Jesus, and waking up; that which is dying WILL DIE. But according to Jesus, this isn't His intention. He's offering a bright light of hope in their darkness if they will respond.
 4. Repent = This means to realign our lives back under the leadership of Christ, by making choices in our attitudes, speech, and actions that honor God. It's a life put back under Christ's leadership.
 5. 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 = The Church was playing out the history of the city, as a people left in charge were asleep when God had called them to be awake.
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- a. This coming of Jesus wasn't an eschatological coming to the globe but a local coming to the Church in Sardis. Jesus was assuring them that if they don't listen, repent, and respond He will come upon them suddenly with judgment. It's been slow building, but when it comes, it will be sudden.
- b. Jesus doesn't intend for the Church in Sardis or the Church at the end of this age to be caught off guard or surprised by His coming. To the praying, sober, and alert Church, His return won't be like a thief. But those who refuse to watch and engage with Jesus, many days, including the final Day will be like a thief.

1. **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, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren are not in darkness 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 or of the darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."*

2. **Matthew 24:43** *"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into."*

D. Revelation 3:4-5 *"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. 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. To the overcomer Jesus gives ASSURANCE that among the crowds (*a few names*) He sees them and will reward them for the way they have lived. These rewards aren't automatic or given to the entire Church but rather individuals who respond to Jesus and remain faithful.
- 2. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments = God has promised an overcoming people that during the millennial reign of Christ they will be clothed with garments that declare the way they have loved Christ during their life (**1st Corinthians 15:38-41; Revelation 7:9-14; 19:7-9**).

 - a. During the Roman era it was common around holidays, celebrations, and great triumphs for the people to wear white Togo's. This was a victory march to be clothed in white. To a struggling Church, in a weak city, that continually suffered defeat the promise of victory would've been sweet.

- 3. 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 = Because Jesus wrote the Book, He's able remove people from it (**Acts 3:19; Rev. 20:12, 15**).

 - a. That word blot, which is Strong's #1813, means to *erase, wash out, whitewash, remove, plaster over, and scratch out*. This isn't being said as a threat, but as a promise of reward for the faithful.
 - b. Jesus is giving the overcomers confidence that if they will confess His name in their culture, He will confess their names before His Father in His Kingdom (**Matt. 10:32**).

E. Revelation 3:6 *"He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*

- 1. The final APPEAL is given to anyone in the ministry that will turn his or her ear to the Holy Spirit and hear what He has to say.
 - a. What Jesus is presenting is not a guarantee that we have what He has mentioned. It's only the invitation and that invitation doesn't become a guarantee for us until we respond rightly to Him.