

The Letter to the church at Sardis: The Dead Church

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February 20, 2022

Introduction

- The city was famous for arts and crafts, and was the first city to mint gold and silver coins
- The famous author Aesop was from Sardis
- Its primary industry was harvesting and dying of wool and making garments from it
- It was situated on a natural acropolis about 1500' above the valley floor, it was very safe from would be intruders.
- Sardis was captured by both Alexander the Great and Antiochus the Great
- In 17 AD, Sardis was destroyed by a severe earthquake, Emperor Tiberius waved their taxes for 5 years to rebuild, and they did rebuild the city, but it was never as great and several hundred years later the city was gone.

Opening Instruction

- To the angel of the church in Sardis write.....

Title of Christ used to the church

- "HE who has the 7 spirits and the 7 stars"
 - o 7 indicates completeness and perfection, so Jesus embodies the full Spirit of God
 - o Jesus has the 7 stars (pastors) in HIS right hand
 - o Jesus maybe saying that the stars should be filled by HIS spirit to do the work of the ministry in the church; only as the star is filled and used can the church be complete in fulfilling her mission and ministry.

Commendation of Jesus to the church

- NONE is given, Jesus had nothing good to say about this church.
- I know your works, you have a name that you are alive, but Jesus said she was dead!

Condemnation of Jesus to the church

- "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead".
 - o Sardis was a dead church that was alive in name only, its members belonged to Christ in name but not in heart. Nominal Christianity existed here.

- She had acquired a name in the community as a progressive church, well regarded in the city and by her neighbors. They had a good reputation among people, but not with the ONE who mattered most!
 - The congregation was quite large and growing, many important people were members, there was no shortage of money and they had plenty of programs and projects.
 - There was every human indication that there was life and vigor in this church,
 - Jesus said this church was as a spiritual graveyard, in that it was populated by unrepentant and unredeemed people, who claimed the name of Christ as they were alive, but they were not HIS.
 - There is a huge difference between reputation and reality and Jesus saw this church as bankrupt and rebukes them for it. The Bible spends much time speaking to the difference between outward appearances and inward reality, the prophets of the OT hammered the children of Israel about this discrepancy and Jesus here takes up the same matter with the church at Sardis. See Isaiah 29:13
- I have not found your works perfect (complete, holy) before God
- To human eyes Sardis was a vibrant and growing church with solid works, Jesus found the works deficient. On the outside this church looked like “the place to be”, that God was moving among them, but to Jesus, they were thoroughly defective and useless to HIM.
 - According to Greek historian, Herodotus, the people of Sardis had, over the course of time, acquired a reputation for lax moral standards, compromising with worldliness and materialism and even open licentiousness and idolatry.
 - They forgot what Paul wrote to the Roman church in chapter 12, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world”, or what John had earlier written in his first epistle, “Love not the world or the things of the world.
 - Our works are meant to confirm and validate our salvation, but at Sardis the works were not perfect because they were in the flesh and not out of a love for and a desire to please Jesus Christ.

Correction to remedy the condition:

The church in Sardis (and those like her) is instructed to first, wake up, strengthen what remains, then to remember its heritage, obey it and repent!

- Wake up
 - Jesus is telling them to come alive, wake up from your spiritual condition

- There were some in the church who were asleep and not dead, Jesus tells them to wake up and come alive
- Strengthen what remains
 - There is still hope for this church, so once awake, those who are strong and alive are to feed, nurture and strengthen those who there.
 - Jesus said there are “ a few in names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled there garments”. There is a godly remnant, a small flock of those true to Christ who remain.
 - When there has been inactivity for a long time, it takes time to get back in shape, Jesus told this church to correct its error, the few who wake up, had to bring life back to this church.
- Remember
 - The shortest road to repentance is remembrance.
 - Nothing can stab the conscience awake as memories of the past.
 - If they could recall the spiritual heritage and background and recall what they used to be and reflect on what, by God’s grace, they could be now, that then, could lead to repentance, turning away from the deadness and sin and back to the Savior!
- Hold fast
 - Obey, the Word, Will and Way of God
 - Get back to sound doctrine, get Jesus back to the forefront of the church
 - Stop depending on “your name” and get back to the “Name above all names”!
- Repent
 - Once again Jesus tells HIS church to repent, to turn away from known sin and move back in a direction toward HIM.
 - This command must be obeyed before any activity of the first 4 can take effect, else there is only shallow and artificial actions that have nothing to make them stick, which is how they became dead in the first place!!

The admonition to the church

- There were a few in Sardis who remained faithful to Christ, He tells them they have not defiled (pollute, smear, stain) their garments and they are worthy of HIS name, of Godly character, HE encourages these faithful believers to walk with HIM.

- Jesus told this church if they did not “watch” and take heed to HIS word, HE would come quickly, and it would be as a thief. This coming speaks to judgment against the church, not HIS 2nd Coming.

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers of the church

- Shall be clothed in white garments
 - o The garments of the redeemed, washed in the blood of Jesus, see Rev 7:14
 - o White garments are reserved for: Christ, Holy angels and HIS glorified church!
- I will not blot out HIS name from the Book of Life
 - o The book of Life contains the names of all people who have ever been or will be born, this is God’s register of souls, Hebrews 12:23.
 - o Those who do not accept Christ or said another way, those who reject HIM, will have their names blotted out of the book of life when they die, up to that point there is hope.
 - City officials often blotted out names of those who defamed their city
 - o True Believers can rest assured that their name will remain in the book of life, while those who rejected Jesus will not be found in the book..... see Rev 20:12-15 and 21:27.
- I will confess his / her name before MY Father and HIS angels
 - o Jesus will deliver on the words HE said in Matthew 10:32, that whoever acknowledges ME, I will also acknowledge him before MY Father in Heaven.
 - o Jesus will confess our names before THE FATHER and all the angels, that we belong in Heaven with HIM. I can only imagine!!

Summary of Sardis

- This church was full of nominal and carnal people who professed Christ, but were not HIS, who assembled at a building called a church and they had a name that it was a live church, but Jesus said it was dead. They belonged to Christ by name, but not in heart. This church can be found in every part of America today.
- Jesus has no commendation for this church, only some encouragement to a few true believers who had not defiled their garments. This church is a dead church but not apostate, as we will see later, there is still a hope for this church, if only she will wake up, get strong and repent as Jesus admonished them.
- If things stay dead long enough, they usually begin to smell bad and cast an unpleasant odor all around them, this church needed the life giving power of the Holy Spirit infused

throughout the fellowship and that only comes by having true believers filling up the place of worship and then they can give “a sweet smelling aroma” unto the Lord, which in the OT (Leviticus 1:9) and the NT (Philippians 4:18) signify an offering of service given to the Lord with the proper attitude, otherwise the aroma was a stench to the nostrils of God.

- This church represents all the churches where Jesus is “barely” there, for most of the people, church is about the latest programs, promotions, or social / political issues; Jesus maybe used when it is convenient and popular, but HE is not adored and worshiped as GOD and LORD.
- Very rarely will you find Bibles used at a Sardian church, as the priest or pastor will just provide a nice encouraging talk to motivate the people to feel good about themselves and have pity on the poor or some sentimental message like that, but nothing is mentioned of sin, hell or future judgment as people might be offended.

The Letter to the church at Laodicea - The Lukewarm (Disgusting) Church

Introduction

- This was the wealthiest city of the 7 cities and was an important commercial center in Asia Minor. It was on a major trade route because of its location.
- The church here was started by Epaphras while Paul visited Ephesus, Paul never came to Laodicea, but references the church and pastor in the end of his letter to the Colossians.
- It was known for 3 primary industries (and Jesus uses these in HIS comments to them):
 - o Banking and money trade, the city and most people were financially prosperous.
 - o Black glossy wool, as a source for black cloaks and carpets
 - o Medical school and medicine mfg, especially “collyrium” which is an eye salve
- There was an underground aqueduct pipeline that transported “hot” boiling spring water from Hierapolis and transported cold fresh mountain water from Colosse to Laodicea as the city water supply.
- When this water got to Laodicea, it was neither hot nor cold but was a disgusting lukewarm, soda laden water that tasted pretty bad, so much so that newcomers to the city would spit it out!
- Jesus knew the industries and topography of the city and HE used these characteristics in HIS comments and rebuke to the church, so we must know that HE also knows everything about our churches and communities today as well.

Opening Instruction

- To the angel of the church at Laodicea write,
- Jesus had nothing good to say to this church, there were no saved people in this church, unlike Sardis that had only a few.
- The church at Philadelphia made Jesus glad, the church at Thyatira made Jesus mad, but the church at Laodicea made Jesus sick!

Title of Christ used to the church

- The Amen
 - o A common Biblical expression that signifies certainty, truth and veracity.
 - o Jesus is the truth about God and all promises of God are fulfilled in Christ.
- The Faithful and True Witness
 - o HE is a completely trustworthy and perfectly accurate witness to the truth of God
 - o HE is faithful to the purpose and mission of God
 - o All truth is bound in the person of Christ
- The beginning of the creation of God
 - o There was heresy in the churches that stated that Jesus was a created being, not a part of the divine Godhead that was present and part of creation. Genesis 1:26-27 and Colossians 1:15-18.
 - o Jesus is addressing this church as Lord, God and Creator.
 - o Jesus is GOD and HE was present at creation, HE is eternal and everlasting
 - o Many cults in religion today believe that Jesus was a created being and not equal with God, so all cults with this belief system, fall into the Laodicean church.

Commendation of Jesus to the church

- Jesus had nothing good to say about this church!
- HE knew the heart of this church and they made HIM sick to HIS stomach.

Condemnation of Jesus to the church

- You are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm (tepid). I will vomit you out of my mouth.
 - o As hot water warms us when we hurt or are cold, the “hot” Christians will bring warmth and comfort to those who need it.
 - o As cold water refreshes us when we are hot, dry and thirsty, the “cold” Christians will bring refreshing and quench the thirst of those who need it.

- So, the hot and cold Jesus is referring to is not that hot is good and cold is bad, but that both the cold mountain waters of Colosse and the hot spring water of Hierapolis served the purpose for the ones who needed it, so both are seen as good and useful.
- You say you are rich and wealthy and need nothing (self-sufficient and independent, or said differently: fat, dumb and happy) ...compare to the church of Smyrna!
 - But “do not know” that you are:
 - Wretched
 - Miserable
 - Poor
 - Blind
 - Naked
 - All of these characteristics are conditions of lostness, compare to the qualities in Matthew 5:3-10 of those who belong to Christ and HIS kingdom.
 - The root cause of half-heartedness is complacency and to be lukewarm is to be blind to one’s true spiritual condition. As lukewarm liquids cause nausea, they are not only tasteless, but positively distasteful and disgusting. This is what Jesus felt of this church.

Correction to remedy the condition, I counsel you to buy from me:

- Gold refined in fire so you can be rich (Speaks to salvation in the Bible)
- White garments, that you may be clothed and your shame not be revealed
 - All the saved have white garments, see Rev 9:14, 19: 8 and 14.
- Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you might see (blindness is lostness in the Bible)
- As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten
- Be eager (zealous) to repent!

Why did Jesus tell them to “buy” from him? Because they said they were rich, self-made, in need of nothing and they were buying that religion from the devil. Jesus said to “transact” / buy from me the things you really need, HE was saying, that to get what they really needed, they had to come to HIM!

HE did not mean they had to “buy” salvation, but they did have to change stores and their shopping patterns!!

The admonition to the church

- Behold, I stand at the door of your church and knock, if anyone inside hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him and he with ME.

- This picture of Jesus shows HIM trying to get into this church. The ones inside are not saved, they are not HIS.
- HE is outside looking in and knocking on the church to come in to this apostate church.
- Since each church is a representation of the people in that church, the classic interpretation of this picture does work of Jesus standing and knocking on a person's heart door.
- How sad Jesus must have been to stand outside this church, knowing their condition and knowing HE could give them so much more, but they would not listen or respond, much like Israel was when HE was on the earth. See Matthew 23:37

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers of the church

- I will grant to sit with ME on MY throne.
 - As Christ overcame the power of sin, death, hell and the grave and has all authority given to HIM, HE will grant that we reign with HIM in glory!!

Summary of Laodicea

- How sad to go through life and not know the reality of your condition and to have a false sense of hope and security, only to find out you have been duped.
- All of the cults and any church that does not accept the deity of Christ fits the model of this church. Any compromise to the Name and Faith of Jesus and you are not HIS.
- This church was spiritually bankrupt and poor, but they did not know it, while the church at Smyrna was spiritually rich but they thought they were poor, what a stark contrast Jesus shows to the readers of HIS Word. This is one of the reasons, ALL the letters were to be read in ALL of the churches.
- These apostate churches honor their denominational leaders and even some of the godless leaders of the world, but they will not honor Christ as Lord and God. HE is outside of their plans, programs, and hearts. They are completely indifferent toward Jesus Christ, thus the lukewarmness!
- During this church age of grace, Jesus will knock at the door of the hearts of man to come in and on the doors of churches so HE can be part of the program, but the way this church at Laodicea lives and acts makes Jesus sick and disgusts HIM.