

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPT 22ND-23RD, 2018 // REVELATION

### TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS (3:1-6)

Sardis at one point had been an important political city, but at the time of this letter they were known for other things.

- Sardis provided a meeting place for several Roman roads & was an important industrial center, specifically for woolen and dyed goods.
- Pagan & emperor worship was very popular, and citizens of Sardis were known for their luxurious, comfortable, and loose way of life.

There doesn't seem to have been any persecution of Christians in Sardis from either Romans or Jews, and the church there enjoyed a reputation of being lively and vibrant (vs. 1).

- But appearances can be deceiving, and Jesus knew the true state of their spiritual lives.
- It seems like the culture in Sardis had led to a deep spiritual apathy among the Christians.

The spiritual decay in the church was not obvious to outward observation, but the reality was that it was almost completely spiritually dead.

- What's presented in Sardis is a picture of nominal Christianity- outwardly engaged, busy with all of the externals of religious activity, but absolutely devoid of any and all spiritual life and power.
- Religious activity is a cheap substitute for the Spirit-filled, Gospel-centered life.

When Christian service becomes performance instead of worship, this is an indication of spiritual death.

- A corpse may look beautiful, but it's still dead!
- The command Jesus gives them is to, "wake up, strengthen, remember, obey, repent."
- This encouragement would have seemed familiar to these people.

In Sardis there was a fortress on a hill that never had been seized by a frontal attack.

- Twice, however, in the history of the city, this fortress had been taken by stealth because of lack of vigilance on the part of its defenders.
- Satan attacks many believers through complacency, lethargy, and spiritual apathy.
- Satan wants us fruitless for God and useless against the kingdom of darkness.

In spite of the majority of this church being dead, Jesus affirmed that there were a few who had remained faithful (vs. 4).

- To those who conquered this challenge of spiritual complacency, Jesus says, "their names will never be blotted out of the book of life" and "he will confess his name before my Father" - a picture of citizenship in the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

### TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

Philadelphia was the youngest of the 7 cities in Asia and was well known for supporting the pagan cult of Dionysus (god of wine and fertility).

- The main problem faced by the church in Philadelphia was from the Jews rather than the pagans- the Jews were most likely excluding Christians from synagogues.
- So Jesus identifies Himself as the one who, "has the key of David..."

In Isaiah 22:22, Eliakim received the key of the chief steward of the king's household, and as the representative of the king was authorized full administrative authority in the king's name.

- The "key of David" is the key to David's house-the messianic Kingdom.
- The Jews in Philadelphia claimed that they alone held the key to the Kingdom of God simply by virtue of their race.

Jesus contradicts this claim by declaring that the key of the Kingdom actually belongs to Him as the Davidic Messiah (Rev. 5:5, 22:16).

- It is Christ alone who can grant entrance into the messianic Kingdom.
- Jesus has been given absolute and exclusive power to give entrance & exclude from the Kingdom of God- He holds the keys!

Jesus had placed before them "an open door that no-one can shut".

- Given the context, this seems to refer to entry into heaven and the Kingdom of God.
- While the Jews had closed their synagogue doors to the believers, no-one could deny them entry into heaven- Christ was the one who had opened that door for them.

This congregation was small ("little strength"), but they were faithful and kept God's word.

- Even though they had been heavily persecuted by the Jewish community, someday Jesus promises that the truth of who He is and who these believers are will be revealed.
- Jesus also promises to keep them from "the hour of trial that is coming on the whole earth" -the first reference in Revelation to the great tribulation.

Some interpreters believe that this verse is a promise that God will remove believers out of the world before the time of testing (a "pre-tribulational rapture").

- Others see this promise to mean one of protection from the experience of his wrath (a "post-tribulationalist" viewpoint).
- Either way, God promises this church (and all believers) protection- however that looks.

To those who conquer Jesus says, "I will make Him a pillar in the temple of my God."

- This is a symbol of a promise of security in the presence of God for all eternity.
- Jesus also mentions the "new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven" for the 1st time to this church- a reference to our final place of dwelling as believers.

### TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (3:14-21)

Laodicea was situated at the convergence of three important roads and was a prominent center of banking and industry.

- The city was so wealthy that when it suffered damage from an earthquake in A.D. 60-61, it was able to finance its own rebuilding.
- The city was famous for its fabrics and its medical school which specialized in manufacturing eye-salve to treat optic disease.

Laodicea was also located between two other cities- Hierapolis (known for hot medicinal waters) & Colossae (known for cold, pure, refreshing water).

- When Jesus criticizes this church for being "lukewarm", no doubt they would've understood

this reference.

• Hot water & cold water are useful for drinking & in medicine, while lukewarm water is not. A common interpretation has been that "hot" represents spiritual fervor & "cold" stands for outright hatred of God, but given the context something else might be being said.

- The words "unusable", "barren", or "fruitless" might be more fitting.
- They seemed to need no-one or nothing- they were "rich" and they "prospered" (vs. 17).
- The things of God weren't important to them.

Apparently their physical wealth had led them to spiritual poverty.

- They were so self-reliant, self-righteous, self-sustaining, and self-sufficient that they didn't think they needed God.

- This had resulted in a useless, barren, and fruitless spiritual life (like lukewarm water) that made Jesus want to "vomit them out of His mouth".
- What He may be referring to is self-righteousness.

Three symptoms of their barrenness are given in vs. 17.

- First, the church said, "I am rich" - they believed they had such material resources that they could do without the Lord's spiritual help.
- The congregation was like the city, proud of its banks and affluence, boasting, "I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing".
- But Jesus calls them "poor".

Second, the church thought it was clothed with plenty of righteous character- but in spite of their fabric manufacturing industry, they were spiritually "wretched, pitiful...and naked".

- Third, the church supposed they had spiritual insight- instead they were "blind"!
- The city so famous for its medical school that helped blindness could do nothing for its own spiritual blindness.

The saddest part of their spiritual state was that Jesus said, "you don't even realize it".

- Self-righteousness is so insidious because when we're trapped in it so often we fail to realize it.
- Jesus tells them to "buy gold from the fire" & "white clothes to wear" (gain true, righteous, God-given character from Christ)... "salve to anoint their eyes" (recognize your blindness, humble yourself, and ask for Christ's wisdom & insight)

Jesus wants not only to provide them with gold, clothing, and sight- he wants them to enjoy His fellowship (vs. 20).

- If only they would admit their need for Christ, He'd come into their midst and reward them with His intimate, personal fellowship.
- To those who overcome, Jesus promised the reward of ruling and reigning with Him for all eternity on His throne (vs. 21).

### WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST NEED?

- To the one who is spiritually asleep...wake up- you have an enemy looking for ways to destroy you.
- To the one who is suffering and discouraged...hold on, don't give in, and stay faithful.
- To one who is self-righteous...humble yourself and recognize your greatest need.