

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 10TH–11TH, 2024 // REVELATION

## SARDIS (REVELATION 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 and was an important industrial center, specifically for wool and dyed goods.
- Pagan and emperor worship were very popular, and citizens of Sardis were known for their luxurious, comfortable, and loose way of life.

Sardis was a place known for its self-sufficiency. Because of its vast wealth, even after an earthquake destroyed the city, its citizens rebuilt it with their own money in 18 months.

- Sardis was a place of self-confidence. It was positioned on a hill safe from any frontal military assaults.
- Sardis was a place of self-indulgence. They were affluent, comfortable, and lived for pleasure.

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 (v. 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.

This spiritual decay in the church was not obvious on the outside, but on the inside this church was almost completely spiritually dead.

- We see in Sardis a picture of nominal Christianity—outwardly engaged, busy with all the externals of religious activity, but devoid of any and all real spiritual life and power.
- Religious activity is a cheap substitute for truly knowing, trusting, and following Jesus.

When our faith becomes a once-a-week box to check instead of a daily lifestyle of worship to our Savior and Lord out of a heart of faith and love, this is an indication of spiritual death.

- A corpse may look beautiful, but it's still dead!
- The urgent command Jesus gives them is to, "be alert...strengthen...remember...[obey]...repent."
- Even though Sardis was seemingly invincible, there had been a history of military invasions.

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

- Twice (549 B.C., 218 B.C.), however, in the history of the city, this fortress had been taken by stealth because of lack of vigilance.
- 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 there were a few who had remained faithful (v. 4).

- To those who conquered this challenge of complacency, worldliness, and dead religion, Jesus says, "I will never erase his name from the book of life" and I "will acknowledge his name before my Father"—a picture of citizenship in the Kingdom and eternal life.

The city of Sardis was affluent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and self-indulgent (just like America), and sadly the church in Sardis started looking just like the surrounding culture.

- We must fight against being seduced by our culture to look more like it than we do disciples of Jesus who live for Him, not for this world.
- One of the most dangerous threats to your spiritual walk is complacency—spiritual sleep.
- "Be alert": examine your life and protect it from any potential spiritual threats.
- "Strengthen": if you're not growing stronger in Jesus daily, you're dying and getting weaker.
- "Remember": meditate on the truths of God's Word every day.
- "Obey": our lifestyle should be marked by daily obedience.
- "Repent": if we don't, there are consequences!

## PHILADELPHIA (REVELATION 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 this small 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 the key of the Kingdom 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 and exclude from the Kingdom of God. He holds the keys!

Jesus had placed before them "an open door that no one can shut" (v. 8).

- 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.
- "Open door" may refer also to something else.

Philadelphia was at the convergence of five major roads that went out into India and even reached China. It was the "open door to the east."

- Travelers would come in and out of Philadelphia and be exposed to Roman/Greek religion and culture for the first time.
- What an opportunity for the church to evangelize and be missionaries in their own city!

The problem isn't that Jesus doesn't open doors of ministry and service for us as Believers, the problem is so often we fail to recognize and walk through those doors.

- Often, we try to open doors that Jesus hasn't yet opened or has already closed, all the while ignoring what's right in front of us in our own backyard.

- Do you see the doors Jesus has opened?

This congregation was small ("little strength"), but they were faithful and kept God's word (v. 8).

- 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 (v. 9).
- Jesus also promises to keep them from "the hour of testing that is going to come"—the first reference in Revelation to the great tribulation.

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

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

To the one who conquers, Jesus says, "I will make [him] a pillar in the temple of my God."

- This is a symbol of a promise of stability and security in the presence of God for all eternity.
- Jesus also mentions the "new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven" for the first time to this church—a reference to our final dwelling place as Believers (v. 12).

## THE VALUE OF FAITHFULNESS AND ENDURANCE.

The compliment Jesus gives these Believers is that they "have kept my word" and "have not denied my name" (v. 8).

- The command given is to "hold on" (v. 11)
- When life is difficult, sometimes the most spiritual thing you can ever do is simply obey God, not give in to sin or compromise, and keep going.
- Never underestimate the value of faithfulness.

## LAODICEA (REVELATION 3:14–22)

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

- The city was famous for its fabrics and medical school which specialized in manufacturing eye salve to treat optic disease.
- Laodicea was also located between two other cities, one known for hot medicinal waters and the other for cold, pure, refreshing water.

Jesus, the speaker of all truth and the originator of all of God's creation, has nothing good to say about this church (v. 14).

- When Jesus criticizes this church for being "lukewarm", no doubt they would have understood this reference.
- Hot and cold water are both useful for drinking and in medicine, while lukewarm water is not—it is quite useless.

Jesus would rather have those who are "hot" (spiritually alive with all the passion and fervency of a transformed life) or "cold" (those who reject Jesus and His Word).

- Those who are "lukewarm" don't really fit in either category. They're not truly saved, yet they don't openly reject Christ and His Word.
- They may attend church, claim to know the Lord, wear the title "Christian" and be quite religious.

Yet, Jesus says they make Him so sick that He's going to vomit them out of His mouth (v. 16).

- A "lukewarm" (fruitless, spiritually barren) life is an indication of no true transformation, no presence of the Holy Spirit, and no true saving faith.
- In spite of their spiritual condition, these Believers seemed to need no one and nothing. They were "rich" and they "prospered" (v. 17).
- The things of God just 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 (just like America).

- This had resulted in a useless, barren, fruitless and almost non-existent spiritual life (like lukewarm water) that made Jesus want to vomit them out of His mouth.

Three symptoms of their lukewarm spiritual life are given in v. 17.

- First, the church said, "I'm 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 become wealthy and need nothing."
- But Jesus calls them "poor."

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

- Third, the church supposed they had spiritual insight, but 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 basically said, "You don't realize it."

- Self-righteousness is dangerous because when we are trapped in it, we often fail to realize it.
- Jesus says to "buy gold refined in the fire" and "white clothes" (gain true, righteous, God-given character from Christ), "ointment to spread on your eyes" (recognize your blindness, humble yourself, and ask for Christ's wisdom and insight).

Jesus wants not only to provide them with gold, clothing, and sight, He wants them to willingly invite Him in to enjoy His fellowship (v. 20).

- If only they would admit their need for Christ and invite Him in, He'd enter their midst and reward them with His personal fellowship.
- To those who conquer this spiritual challenge, Jesus promised they would rule and reign with Him for all eternity on His throne (v. 21).

## "I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK"

- Jesus has the key to death and hades, yet He's knocking on the door to your heart and life. He's not going to force Himself in, you must let Him in.
- Some are too busy, others too scared, and others too ashamed to open the door. But those who do will experience His life, power, presence, love, and fellowship, which change absolutely everything.
- "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen..."