

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 11TH, 2024 // REVELATION

SARDIS: A DEAD CHURCH (REVELATION 3:1-6)

THE CITY OF SARDIS

At the time of John's writing, this once-wealthy city had started to decline. Several important roads and trade routes converged in Sardis making it a **place of easy money and decadence**.

- Sardis was **self-sufficient, self-confident, and self-indulgent**. The church mirrored their city and was **affluent, idle, and unwatchful**. The church in Sardis had the best reputation out of the 7.

"REPUTATION FOR BEING ALIVE"

Sardis looks vibrant and healthy, maybe seeing growth numerically, and known in the community, but Jesus says, **"you are dead."**

- The church was full, the "cool" place to be, and wealthy, but **spiritually it was a graveyard**. The church with the best reputation was in the worst place spiritually. **We can be busy while still not doing any actual work.**

THE DIRECTIVE

Jesus tells them to **"be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die"**—essentially, strengthen yourself in the Lord and die to self.

- It wasn't hopeless, but the works they did were not up to the standard of God because **their heart was not in it**. Jesus told them to **remember how they first received the gospel, hold fast to it, and repent**.

THE WARNING

The nominal Christians in Sardis were warned what would happen if they did keep watch. Jesus said **He would come like a thief**.

- His language seems to communicate that He is not talking about the 2nd coming but instead, an abrupt judgment where **He would remove their earthly blessing**. In either sense, they were to be watchful.

THE PROMISE

In some of the other churches there were a few bad among the good, but in Sardis, **there were few good among the bad**.

- If they were to **join the ones who had not "defiled their clothes"** by giving in to the immorality of the city, then they too could **walk in close fellowship** with Christ and be **cleansed of their impurities**.

INTERESTING HISTORY OF SARDIS

The city of Sardis was overtaken twice. **Because of their overconfidence and false security, they let their guard down and did not keep watch**.

- If we ignore the warnings of Christ to be alert, we too will let our guard down, become apathetic and entitled, and open ourselves up to attacks.**

PHILADELPHIA: AN OPEN DOOR (REVELATION 3:7-13)

THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

It was the youngest of the 7 cities and founded as a **center for spreading Hellenism (Greek culture) throughout the Asian provinces**.

- Philadelphia was a beautiful, prosperous city **built to spread a pagan religion**. It was dubbed "Little Athens" because **it had so many altars, temples, and gods, and its main exports were religion and wine**.

HE IS THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS AND THE DOORS

Jesus quoted Isaiah 22:20-23 to show that **He has opened the door to ministry and outreach in the town**.

- Let us not become so focused on the doors that are closed that we fail to see the ones that are opened. When opportunity comes, we need to take it, but when doors close, we need to move on.**

NO REBUKE FOR PHILADELPHIA

Christ has no complaint against the church. To say they were of little strength does imply weakness, but **real strength is found in Christ** (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- The church in Philadelphia was **faithful to Jesus and His Word**. The idea behind "have not denied my name" shows that **they lived in a faithful way**.

USING HEAVENLY METRICS

The church was praised for being **evangelistic, relying on God, and staying faithful to Jesus**. They were not praised for the size of their congregation, their building, or any other earthly metric we use to measure success.

- A small church that has placed its faith in God can do more than a big church that has placed its faith somewhere else.**

THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

Similar to Smyrna, we see that members of **the Jewish synagogue were causing serious trouble for the Christians in Philadelphia**.

- Jesus promises that the Jews would **"bow down at your feet,"** not that they would worship them, but **begin to worship with them or be brought to their knees when they find out they were wrong** (Philippians 2:10-11).

KEEPING THEM FROM THE "HOUR OF TESTING"

This is the first reference in Revelation about the "Great Tribulation" that will be initiated by God. **Jesus promises the faithful of this church they will not suffer through this awful time**.

- This is where people start to disagree about how the church will be spared suffering during this time. **Does this refer to a "rapture" or is Jesus saying He will protect them from His wrath?**

HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

Along the main street in Philadelphia were **pillars with names of citizens whom the Emperor wanted to honor**.

- Jesus uses this example to encourage the church to **"hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown"** and He will make for them a pillar in heaven, **symbolizing security and permanency with God forever**.

LAODICEA: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (REVELATION 3:14-22)

LAODICEA

It was an important, wealthy city at the **center of Caesar worship and the god of healing**, Asklepios. It was an **exporter of goods** around the world, so wealthy **they didn't need anyone's help** when the city was devastated after an earthquake in 60 AD.

- Their vulnerability to attacks led them to negotiate and compromise with enemies instead of fighting.**

THE USEFULNESS OF HOT AND COLD WATER

The main water supply came from a six-mile aqueduct from a hot spring, making the water unappetizingly lukewarm. **Laodicea was between Hierapolis's hot springs and Colossae's pure cold springs**.

- The hot water is used medicinally to heal, and the cold springs are refreshing, but **lukewarm water is useless for both purposes**.

MISUNDERSTOOD MEANING

This doesn't mean God wishes we were "all-in" or "all-out." God desires that no one would perish (2 Peter 3:9). Hot or cold is not related to the state of their faith. Instead, **"lukewarm" implies not being of use, or doing nothing**.

- There is no neutrality with Jesus. We either make ourselves useful for His purposes or we are vomited out of His mouth.**

"CHURCH OF THE LAODICEANS"

Laodicea means "rule of the people" and this church was **run by the majority rule instead of God**. It was this apathetic, self-righteous view of the people that pushed them to claim, **"I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing."**

- Jesus informed the church of their poverty with **"you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."**

COURSE CORRECTION

Jesus encouraged them to turn from the material things they put their love into and **invest in things that will last** and cover their nakedness by **ending unrighteous acts**.

- They were known globally for a healing eye ointment, yet **full of Christians who couldn't see spiritually**. So, Jesus told them to **use a spiritual ointment, the Holy Spirit, to help them see**.

HE LOVES US ENOUGH TO DISCIPLINE US

Arguably the worst out of the 7 churches and most deserving of strong rebuke, Jesus says to them, **"As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline."**

- We must recognize a **father disciplines and corrects out of love, knowing what is best for his children. If we humble ourselves and rely on Him for what we truly need, we will "sit with [God] on [His] throne."**

THE GREAT INVITATION

Jesus stands at the door of the hearts of sinners and saved alike, and **He is asking to come in and have a deep, meaningful relationship with us**.

- He stands and knocks, but **we must open the door through repentance and putting away pride, self-sufficiency, our own human wisdom, and the comfort of complacency**.

INVENTORY

- Do we see the doors that Jesus has opened for us to spread the gospel?**
- We must make following Jesus our life, **not just a hobby or something we do occasionally**.
- The key to opening the door is to first hear the voice of Jesus. **What is drowning out the voice of Jesus?**
- Are we honest with ourselves and others?**