

Jesus' Letter To The Church In Sardis

Text : **Revelation 3: 1-6** (**Hebrews 10: 23-36**)

INTRODUCTION :

A. Where is the most peaceful place in the area ?

1. Not in a commercial district because of the traffic.
2. Not in the park because of the children playing.
3. It is in the graveyard. Everyone is quiet there.

B. With this lesson we'll learn from Jesus' letter to the church in Sardis, the most peaceful church in Asia Minor, the church at Sardis. (*Peaceful because it was dead.*)

1. There is no indication of it being persecuted from without.
2. There is also no indication of discord from within.
3. Even so, Jesus gave it the most negative review of all the seven churches.

* **Instead of rebuking the ungodly culture, it was living at peace with it.**

I. The attitude of the church reflected the attitude of the city of Sardis.

A. The main god worshipped by the city was the pagan goddess Cybele.

1. She was called the mother of all gods. (*goddess of rebirth*)
2. Worship involved sexual orgies.
3. The goal was to get male worshippers into such a frenzy they would castrate themselves, put on women's clothing and become priests.

B. The city of Sardis was synonymous with decadence.

1. Even the pagans spoke evil of it.
2. Sardinians were looked down on as lovers of pleasure and luxury.
3. The name was a byword with slack and effeminate living.

C. The city of Sardis was the oldest city in Asia Minor and a very rich city.

1. Founded about 1200 B.C.
2. For about 150 years it had been the capital of the kingdom of Lydia.
3. For centuries it was the richest city in the world.
 - a. It's king (*Croesus*) became the proverb for wealth. (*Like Bill Gates*)
 - b. Sardis was the origin of the modern monetary system. (*first coins*)

D. The source of their wealth was not King Midas as was once believed.

1. There was gold and silver in the hills in which the city was built. (*In river thru city*)
2. The Sardis stone was also found there. (*Manufactured jewelry*)
3. They were world famous for the textiles they made.
 - a. They had a bountiful supply of wool from the fertile Hermus Valley.
 - b. They invented the dying process for wool.
4. Sardis was a strategic trading city.
 - a. It was located where 5 roads intersected.
 - b. It connected : Thyatira ... 30 mi. northeast
 Smyrna ... 45 mi. west
 Ephesus ... 67 mi. southwest
 Philadelphia ... 28 mi. southeast
 Susa ... 1615 mi. east (Royal Highway of Persia)

E. It was one of the most secure cities in the ancient world.

1. It was built 1500 ft. above the valley below.
2. It sat on a ridge of rock that stuck out from Mt. Tmolus like a pier.
 - a. Thus, it was surrounded on three sides by a steep cliff which could not be scaled.
 - b. This security proved to be their downfall on two occasions.
 - c. They were taken by Cyrus in 549 B.C. and Antiochus 200 years later. (*Tell story*)
3. In 17 A.D. the city was destroyed by powerful earthquake.
 - a. *Eusebius described it as “the greatest earthquake in human memory.”*
 - b. Tiberius helped rebuild it and it became prosperous, but lost its political power.
4. It met its final destruction at the hands of the Mongols in the fifth century.
- *5. This information is all important to understanding God's message to the churches.

II. Jesus introduces Himself as holding the future of the church in His hand.

A. Vs. 1 - To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

1. The seven stars in His hand are seven messengers. (**1: 20**)
 - a. Messengers are seven people who communicate God's will to the seven churches.
 - b. Some believe these to be the preachers ... others think they are elders.
2. The message is that Jesus controls the source of their revelation.

Remember :

* *The way Jesus identifies Himself to the church is relevant to His message to them.*

B. The spirits of the churches being in the hand of Jesus indicates two things :

1. **One**, Jesus is protecting the churches.
 - a. Compare : **John 10: 28-29**
 - b. Protection is spiritual, not the prevention of physical harm or persecution.
 - *c. If protection was from physical harm some would come just for physical benefit, e.g., some followed Jesus for the loaves and fishes. (**John 6: 26**)
2. **Two**, that which is in the hand of Jesus is in His control.
 - a. For example, it is only Jesus who can remove a lampstand. (**Rev. 2: 5**)
 - b. To be removed is to be taken out of the presence of God.

Thus, Jesus holds the future of churches in His hand ... He controls it.

III. Jesus sees behind our masks.**A. Vs. 1b - ... says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'**

1. The church at Sardis had a good reputation in the brotherhood.
2. **What** would cause brethren to view them as a church that is lively ?
 - a. Activities ... *plenty of programs, enthusiastic worship, lots of youth, etc.*
 - b. Sardis was said to be a center of Christianity in the area, **a large church.**
 - c. **Remember** : The Pharisees were viewed as righteous by their peers, but they were condemned by Jesus more than any others.

B. God sees right past the physical into the souls of men.

1. That which impresses men does not fool God.
 - a. **I Sam. 16: 7-** ... **for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**
 - b. Because this is true, we must not rely on the church's reputation.

I Cor. 4:5 - **Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (Cf.- Heb. 4: 12)**
2. When people think they are fooling God, they deceive themselves.
 - a. **Matt. 15: 8** - **This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.**
 - b. **Matt. 7: 21-23** ... **BUT LORD ... have you forgotten all I did for you.**
3. Four different times the N.T. warns us not to deceive ourselves.

(**I Cor. 3: 18, Gal. 6:3, Jas. 1: 26, I John 1: 8**)

Thus, we must not allow ourselves to rely on man's standards to evaluate us.

IV. Vs. 2-3 Jesus gives the church at Sardis five commands.

Rev. 3: 2-3 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. **3** So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

A. Wake up (*Get on the ball !! Don't just set there; get up and get busy.*)

1. They have fallen into a state of **inactivity**. (*Drifting on their past laurels.*)
 - a. Sleep is necessary to rejuvenate the weary.
 - b. **BUT** ... those sleep in the day are slothful.
2. **I Thes. 5: 4-6** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; **5** for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; **6** so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. (Cf.- **Eph. 5: 6-14**)

B. Strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; (Cf.- **James 5: 8** ... Do it)

1. The principle of **atrophy** is just as true in the spiritual realm as in the physical.
 - a. "Use it or lose it" is a principle of life.
 - b. No living thing can stay just as it is.
2. The original word is "*sterizo*"
 - a. It means "*to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix.*"
 - b. This is the word from which we get words like "*steroid*" and "*sterile*."
3. Spiritual atrophy kills more churches and more souls than overt rebellion.
 - a. The Christian can never be satisfied with the status quo.
 - b. The instant we become satisfied with the way things are **atrophy sets in**.
 - c. If you remain inactive, don't expect your faith to remain strong **or** even viable.

C. Remember what you have received and heard;

1. The prodigal son didn't return until he remembered what he had left. (**Luke 15: 11ff**)
2. We need to be constantly reminded of what the gospel message is and means.

II Pet. 3: 1-2 This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, **2** that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. (**I Cor. 15: 1-5ff**)
3. *For this reason it is of vital importance that Christians stay in the word.*

D. And keep it,

1. This is why the Christian reads his bible constantly.
 - a. Reading is not just for pleasure.
 - b. Also, reading and studying is not just to gain knowledge.
 - c. Without application, reading is worthless. (*Get no points from God for reading*)
2. Ezra understood exactly why one should read the bible or listen to it be taught.
Ezra 7: 10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

V. His fifth command to our brethren at Sardis was that they must “repent.”**A. The Lord’s message for this church is the most negative of any of the seven.**

1. Jesus usually starts off observing their good points, but not with this church.
2. They have a great reputation among the brethren,
but Jesus has nothing good to say about them. *How very sad !!*

B. Once they remember what they should be, they MUST act upon it. (Turn)

1. Jesus demands this of everyone.
Vs. 6- “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
2. Every time one hears the word his heart is tested.
 - a. “*Hearing*” demands a response.
 - b. **II Cor. 7:10- For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of ...**
3. Every decision one makes has consequences.
 - a. **Vs. 3- Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.**
 - b. Every time one hears the word or reads it, he makes a decision. (*apply or not*)

VI. Though most in the church are dead, some are not.

- A. Vs. 4-5 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.
 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**

1. This is one of the most encouraging passages in the entire bible.
2. There is nothing much more discouraging than to be stuck in a dead congregation.
3. **God knows** who the dead wood is and He knows the branches that are fruitful.

B. IF you do not become one of the deadheads, God will not judge you with them.

1. Your name will not be blotted out of His book. (*You will be a citizen of His place.*)
2. You will be given a white robe. (*He will make you pure, free from sin.*)
3. You will walk with Him. (*You will live with Him in His very presence.*)

CONCLUSION :

A. HOWEVER ... one must choose to continue faithful in his service to Christ.

1. The reward is only for “**he who overcomes.**”
 - a. Do not let those who are dead cause you to become like them.
 - b. It is easy to become discouraged and join the majority.
2. The survival of the church depends upon those few who bear fruit.

REMEMBER :

- a. What Jesus did to the fig tree which bore no fruit. (**Luke 13: 6-9**)
- b. What did he say would happen to His branches which bore not fruit ? (**John 15**)

B. Those who do not overcome will be judged according to their deeds.

1. **Ezek. 24: 14-** “I, the Lord, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you,” declares the Lord God.’ ”
- b. Remember our secondary text : **Heb. 10: 19-36**
 “It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

INVITATION :

The choice is yours. He waits to welcome you.

Lesson Text :

Revelation 3: 1-6

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Hebrews 10: 23-36

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; **24** and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **25** not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27** but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. **28** Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. **29** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." **31** It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, **33** partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. **34** For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. **35** Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. **36** For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.