

Revelation 3:1-6

"Settling For Reputation; Or Striving For Reality?"

Yes, they were churches literally (& we realize they have application in church history); but the message is to you & me presently. Having an ear we do well to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (& that my friends is you & me). So these 7 letters to the 7 churches ought not be looked on as ancient writings/ancient relics but rather more like mirrors in which we examine *ourselves*!

I can't speak for you but as for myself I've been challenged (& prayerfully/hopefully) changed having stopped to think *through* & listen *to* each of these letters so far. The reminder to return to our 1st love; to be faithful to Jesus unto death, to cut out compromise & be purged of pollution that we might walk in purity before the Lord. I want to be in that # of overcomers who eat from the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God; who receive the crown of life; who feed *on* & find satisfaction *in* the hidden manna, the true Bread from heaven; even J.C. Himself. I want to rule & reign in righteousness w/J.C. shepherding the sheep of His hand throughout His millennial kingdom upon the earth. **God help us that we might draw near *to* Him, walk intimately *w/Him* in obedience *before* Him & so glorify & magnify Him upon the earth; & may He have His way completely in you & in me that we might be well pleasing in His sight. May we learn what it means to decrease that He might increase in our lives...**

As we enter Ch 3 we continue S.E. from Thyatira another 30 miles or so to the city of Sardis & the church found therein. Sardis (in reality) was known for several things. It was a military stronghold because it was built (primarily) upon a plateau so that there was really only entrance on one side; the rest of it protruded upward some 1500' making a natural seemingly impenetrable type fortress.

Of course the problem w/what seems to be "bullet proof" is that it creates a false sense of security, & more than once in the city's history it was attacked & overcome through the very means in which it felt most secure. Believing it to be impenetrable there was no guard on the wall so it was taken from Croesus (one of history's wealthiest kings) by Cyrus via the Persian army, from the Persians by Alexander the Great, then by Antiochus the Great, & finally by the Romans. **Overconfidence caused apathy & a failure to watch for the work of the enemy... Money (in Asia Minor) was 1st minted in Sardis (under Croesus), there were several important trade routes that converged upon that city. It was simply wealthy, luxurious & lazy.**

It was destroyed by an earthquake under the rule of Tiberius; he rebuilt it but it never recaptured its former glory. By the time this letter was written it was in a state of decline; I point these things out because they're tied to how Jesus addresses them & the things He wants to deal w/in them. The city was in many ways a reflection of the spiritual condition of the church.

Historically this brings us to the church age represented from the early 1500's through around 1800 A.D. You recall we spoke last week of some of the things that arose in the period prior to this known historically as "The Dark Ages"; the selling of indulgences, lighting candles to help loved ones out of purgatory, the worship of Mary, praying to "saints" & worshiping various idols unto them etc...

Well, in 1328 a man by the name of John Wycliffe was born, he began to take issue w/some of the teachings of the Catholic church & had it in his heart to get bibles back into the hands of God's people in their own language (as opposed to Latin). Of course the Roman Catholic Church had a huge problem w/that & w/him. **Yet his writings influenced a man by the name of Jan (John) Hus who carried Wycliffe's torch but was torched himself on July 6th 1415 when he was burned at the stake w/Wycliffe's manuscript bibles used as kindling for the fire having been falsely accused of heresy by the catholic church.** History records his last words as saying, "In 100 yrs, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform *cannot* be suppressed." It was on October 31st in 1517 that a man by the name of Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses of Contention (which was a list of 95 issues of heretical theology & crimes of the Roman Catholic Church) into the church door at Wittenberg in Germany.

Now I'm not going to go into a lecture on church history (& none of this is extremely detailed), but here's my point. **These were men, (John Knox, John Calvin, John Wesley [evidently John was a popular name of that age☺]) who began to "protest" the heretical doctrines that arose in the Roman Catholic Church; thus you have the "Protest-ant" movement brought forth out of the Reformation age.** The Methodists, the Lutherans, the Presbyterians are a few of the churches that were born out of the ministries of these men.

As for Sardis; industries such as jewelry, dye & textiles made the city rich. It was a center of pagan worship which boasted a large, stately temple to the mother goddess Cybele (seen elsewhere in scripture as "Diana of the Ephesians"). **The temples columns were 60' high & over 6' in diameter; she was worshipped as you might imagine through all kinds of sexual impurity & immorality; so w/that let's look at Ch 3 beginning in Vs 1.**

Vs 1-6

If I were to apply 1 particular Vs to this church that sorta summed the whole thing up I'd probably pick Eph 5:14, "*Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.*"¹ "You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." Listen, a good reputation is only worth its weight if it's backed up by reality.

This is a church that's riding the wave of a good reputation but in reality there's no substance. In certain respects I can identify w/that. There was a day when I was a pretty good guitar player; & through playing around town at various parties or clubs people began to perceive me as such. However; today I'm not ½ the player I was 20 yrs ago, however people who haven't seen or heard me play in yrs still think I'm really good (& I have no reason to discourage that thought so I just ride the reputation [hopefully my secret is safe w/you! ☺). However if I were sincerely challenged it would become obvious; it's all reputation, no reality. That's where Sardis is at spiritually; all reputation, no reality.

It's like looking at the stars at night. Do you realize that when you look at the stars, the truth of the matter is that you're looking back in time? For example the North star is 430 light years from earth. Meaning that it takes the light from that star 430 yrs to reach this planet. So when you look at the light shining from the north star you're seeing something that began it's journey 430 yrs ago. That star could've burned out 400 yrs ago & we wouldn't know it for another 30 yrs or so. It would simply be the light of a brilliant past that we see but the truth of the matter is that there's no light source in the present...

That's Sardis; it appears to be shining brightly, as if all was well; but the truth is there was no longer the light source; it was like the rays of the source were still traveling but it was the results of something in the past, there was nothing there in the present.

It has all the nuances of life outwardly, but inwardly it's dead. To me this is a very scary church to be associated with & one we want to carefully, prayerfully search our hearts concerning. We don't want to rest on works of the past; we want to be moving forward in the present through the Person & the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Vs 1

We saw this description of Jesus back in Ch 1. It's a reference (as seen by the usage of the # 7 [the # of completion]) to the fact that Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit & has all spiritual power & authority. The 7 stars speak of the complete church in that these represent the pastors of the churches through whom Jesus ministers by His Spirit.

¹ The New King James Version. 1982 (Eph 5:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The church (& it's leaders) belongs in totality to Jesus. Therefore it's no wonder that when Jesus speaks to a dead church that He identifies Himself as the one to whom the church belongs & that by Him comes the life of the church through the Person & Power of the Spirit Whom He also has & desires to give to the church.

W/out the Spirit of God, the church of God is dead. That's the essence of what Paul was saying when he wrote, *"those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."*² What's true in our lives individually is true in our lives collectively as a body, if we don't have the Spirit; we're not alive in Christ but dead in sin. True human ministry is the overflow of the reality of the Spirit of God in our lives; it's not simply man made programs &/or activities.

Activity is not synonymous w/spirituality; most protestant churches today are filled w/activities but there's no true spirituality. They're moving, they're grooving, they're busy & filled w/activity; but in reality our country is still spiraling out of control in the spirit of liberalism. *If it weren't primarily dead orthodoxy then the roughly 75% of Americans that claim to be Christians would be distinguishably different than the world that surrounds them, amen?*

Jesus said to Sardis, "I know your works"; they had a lot going on. We can know that because as far as their reputation was concerned they were happening; they were appealing, their bulletin was full of various ministry opportunities. *Yet Jesus doesn't mention any of them; I'd suggest to you the reason for that is because they're all irrelevant due to the fact that they're simply the mechanics of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit.*

They had a reputation outwardly as being alive, but to God (Who searches the heart inwardly) they were dead. I believe it was Alan Redpath who said that if the Holy Spirit removed Himself from most churches, 95% of their activities would carry on no differently. That was Sardis, we don't want it to be us! Lively, but not alive...

In many ways they were like the Pharisees who seemed to have it all together outwardly, but it was a façade that hid their lack of true life & vitality. Drawing near to God w/their lips, honoring Him w/their mouths, but their hearts were far from Him.

"But you are dead." A good reputation is no guarantee of true spiritual character is it? Jesus is searching our heart.

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Ro 8:8-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There was no doctrinal error Jesus pointed to, no persecution; why? They weren't a threat to the enemy, they (quite frankly) weren't worth attacking... They rested in peace... **Not the peace of the Lord, but the peace that's etched on grave stones once someone has passed away. "Rest, in peace" that was the Motto of the church of Sardis, not the peace of Christ's life, but of death.**

Vs 2-3

"Wake up!" Jesus says, "Be watchful", remember the city's history? Overtaken by the enemy because of an overconfidence, resting on the reputation of being impenetrable. Jesus says, "As has went the city, so is going the church;" things have gone so well in the past that they're not worried about nor paying attention to their present state. Paul the apostle said it like this, **"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."**³

"It's not a total loss" Jesus says, "There is still time to strengthen that which remains, the situation is bad, it's very bad, but not hopeless." "That are ready to die" the ministry of the church of Sardis is on the endangered species list; but though it's late, it's not too late.

The diagnosis, "I haven't found your works perfect before God." Their works have been weighed in the balance & found wanting; they're lively, not alive. There's labor but not resulting from an overflow of love for God...**It's not just about being busy; simply having works isn't enough. It always comes back to the intent & motive of our heart... Do we do what we do (ultimately) from a self serving motive or a "God serving" "God glorifying" "love for God" kind of motive?**

He says, "Your works aren't perfect" or "complete, mature". God has begun the work but they're in the way of Him bringing His desire into full fruition. Having begun in the Spirit they're now in the flesh...

Now, notice the exhortation in Vs 3. They're not told to remember *"what"* they've received and heard but rather *"how"* they've received & heard it, to hold fast to it & to repent of their present lethargic & life draining state. The reference is to the Word of God; the gospel message, that's *what* they received. The question is "How" did they receive it? The answer is, "As it was in truth." Paul describes in 1st Thess the kind of reception of the word they needed to remember. He said, **"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."**⁴

³ The New King James Version. 1982 (Ro 13:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Th 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus says, "Get back to allowing the Word of God to be the authority in your life; not from the surface, but in your spirit, in your soul, in your heart. Bear the fruit worthy of repentance". Christianity isn't a one time decision; it's a lifestyle, a relationship w/the One True Living God; it's about believing the message & receiving the Person of J.C.

"If you won't watch, I will come upon you as a thief," judgment will drop suddenly, unexpectedly & w/out warning (this is their warning).

Now again this could be w/reference to the rapture. Jesus said more than once that He would come as a thief, at a time & in an hour we weren't expecting therefore we're to watch & be ready. W/regard to His 2nd coming the bible tells us exactly when that will be; the clock starts at the rapture & 7 yrs later Jesus will return. It's the rapture that's surrounded w/ambiguity & uncertainty. Don't think that's no intentional. As Augustine said, "The last day is hidden from us, that everyday may be observed by us."

Much of the "mainline" church isn't watching for Jesus come for them, they don't believe in the rapture of the church; they'll be caught off guard. Write it down & look it up later: Matt 25:1-13; don't slumber, don't sleep, watch, be ready, looking for the Lord; being continually filled w/the Holy Spirit by the Lord.

Vs 4

Here's a clue as to how reprobate & immoral Sardis was, "You have a few even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments." That is, they haven't polluted the purity that God has ordained for the Christian walk & witness through sin; there is a faithful remnant even in Sardis. It's interesting that in Pergamos & in Thyatira there were a few bad among the good, however in Sardis there are a few good among the bad!

"And they shall walk w/Me in white, for they are worthy." It's the picture of intimacy w/Christ, undefiled through sin. It reminds of Enoch (Gen 5:24) who walked w/God; & he was not for God took him.

Walking intimately w/Jesus being near to Jesus is the greatest reward of all isn't it? To the one who forsakes sinful compromise & returns to the authority of the Word of God in their life, they'll be rewarded w/a closer, more intimate walk w/Jesus. Not because they've earned it but because God is honoring the desire of their heart to pursue Him. It's the Matt 5:8 principle, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."*⁵

Vs 5

⁵ The New King James Version. 1982 [Mt 5:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Clothed in white” how critical it is to be robed in the righteousness of Christ. Again write it down look at it later Matt 22:2-14; w/out the proper garment you will not enter the wedding feast. Our works are like being clothed in filthy rags, but to be covered by the work of Christ upon the cross is to be clothed in fine linen, white & pure.

Along w/the appropriate garment (the righteousness of Christ) comes the assurance of everlasting life. “I will not blot out his name from the book of Life.” (Try to tackle *this* statement in a few minutes ☺!)

Ok, while the *implication* here is that one’s name could be blotted out, the actual *affirmation* is that it *won’t be* blotted out.

What is the book of life? Well, I’ll tell you what it’s not, it’s not a church membership roster. Being a regular participant in church services doesn’t make you a Christian nor does it gain your entrance into heaven. What makes you a child of God & ensures your entrance to heaven is grace through faith in J.C.

Now there are those who will say that one’s name blotted out means that they were never believers to begin with; that everyone’s name is written in the book when they’re born & if they reject Jesus it’s blotted out.

While that sounds logical I’m not certain it’s biblical, meaning you’d be hard pressed to demonstrate that purely from the scriptures.

Again the context here is that of assurance yet I believe we do well to consider carefully what the Word has to say about the Book of Life.

It’s a real book, it will be opened on the Day of Judgment; it will be read & anyone who’s name isn’t found in it will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15). So it’s a critical book & one that we want to ensure our name is in... If your name *is* in the book you should be topped out w/joy (Luke 10:20).

We also find in the scriptures (Ex 32:32,33, Ps 69:28, Rev 3:5 & 22:19) no less than 5 references to people being blotted out of the Book of Life. So the idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life & the connotations contained therein is certainly something the Lord would have us take seriously & consider carefully.

1st things 1st, make sure your name is in the book, just being born won’t do it for you. You’ve got to be “born again” through faith in Christ to have your name inserted in that book. I always point to the safety zone of John 15.

If you'll simply abide in Christ, you'll never have to worry or wonder about it. Just abide in Christ & let His word abide in you & Jesus will confess your name before His Father & before His angels.

What an incredible promise...You guys it only makes sense that we should confess His name. I mean to confess His name is forgiveness of sin, everlasting life, the promise & comfort & power of the Holy Spirit, it's wholeness of heart; the rewards that comes *from* Him, the promise to rule & reign *with* Him, it only makes sense. Only a fool wouldn't confess His name; think it through.

But what's amazing is that after everything you've done, where you've been & who you are; He would be unashamed to confess *your* name, or *my* name...

It's important to accept Jesus, but far more important is the assurance that Jesus has accepted us.

Vs 6

This is a message that comes to us all. How easy it is to drift in sleepy apathy toward spiritual death, especially when you have a good reputation (people recognize that you are mature in Christ). Maybe you're drifting today, or maybe you're spiritually dead, don't despair; repent; my Jesus specializes in raising the dead; call upon the Lord & so receive life in His name!

Prayer Points:

Lord revive us...help us to remember how we have received & heard; to hold fast & to repent of apathy & lethargy & fill us fresh w/the power of the Holy Spirit. May we walk in purity & seek You whole heartedly that we might walk w/You in white being found worthy, not by our works but by being robed in Your righteousness through faith. Strengthen us Lord, in our dedication & consecration to You...

The question hits home doesn't it? Is your name written in the Book of Life? Have you placed your faith/trust in J.C. for the forgiveness of sin? Have you repented/turned from your sin & received Him; has He come into your heart & changed your life? Are you watching for & awaiting His return? If you can't answer a resounding "Yes" to everyone of the those questions I want to invite you to open your heart, turn from your sin & trust in Jesus right here, right now...