

## Revelation: Sardis, a Church with a Name (Revelation 3:1-6).

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/14/2015)

### Introduction

1. Sardis was rebuilt by Alexander the Great on a hill with three sides of sheer precipices, giving the residents false confidence in their security.
  - a. The lack of watchfulness due to self-confidence caused the city to fall to its enemies on several occasions.
  - b. This fault apparently affected the church as well, for Jesus rebuked the slumbering church with the command to wake up to watchfulness.
2. The city was also known for its worship of the goddess Cybele (identified with Artemis—Acts 19:27) who was known to restore life to the dead.
  - a. This may suggest why Jesus spoke of the church as being dead but thinking they were alive.
  - b. *Death* is used metaphorically in describing the church because spiritual death is the condition of the unsaved, not spiritually lethargic believers who only appear to be dead to the Lord.
3. In the 19th century, a scholar traveled to Turkey to see if any gospel witness remained in these seven cities of Asia Minor, and he found it in all but two—Ephesus and Sardis.
  - a. The reputation of the church as observed either of themselves or others was not what Christ observed.
  - b. We must not self-diagnose our spiritual health. Only Jesus truly knows our real condition.

### I. A Critical Condition

1. Thinking that one is right with God because he and others think him so is a dangerous condition.
  - a. Self-deception leads to apathy and lethargy, a spiritual indolence that robs one of true spiritual life.
  - b. Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*) describes three fellows sleeping: Simple (*dullness*), Sloth (*lethargy*) and Presumption (*self-sufficiency*), whose condition is self-inflicted comatose confinement.
2. Christ's remedy for spiritual stupor:
  - a. Wake yourself up to spiritual vigilance and watchfulness.
  - b. This vigilance is necessary to "strengthen" what remains of the church's dying vitality.
3. Christ's observation is that their *works* were incomplete. Ephesians 2:10 instructs that God has created us in Christ for the works He has prepared for us (see also Matt. 7:21). Are we doing the will of God?
4. Some people look spiritual and impress others but fall short of God's expectation, dulling themselves in spiritual sloth (Rev. 16:15; see Luke 21:34-36).

## II. A Necessary Remedy

1. Awakening from spiritual slumber requires an understanding of one's need and submitting to God's remedy through the Spirit (Eph. 5:7-20).
  - a. Attempting to live out one's faith through self-motivation and in self-effort is foolish and futile.
  - b. Christ commands us to *remember* how we received the gospel at the first and hold tight to that work of God in us producing repentance and faith.
2. This return to spiritual submission and dependence upon the Spirit requires Spirit-generated repentance.
  - a. The first word of the gospel is not belief but repentance unto faith.
  - b. Repentance is not a one-time act but a lifetime condition of seeing how great and glorious is Christ and how weak and sin-prone is the believer.
3. The great deception of our day is to see salvation only in terms of how it affects the individual or the church.
  - a. No one is saved solely for his own benefit.
  - b. No church exists solely for the benefit of its members.
  - c. Advancing Christ's kingdom is God's purpose in the earth, which requires the redemption of a people demonstrating His grace and glory through Spirit-empowered selfless and obedient living.

## III. A Dire Warning

1. Christ issues a threat of judgment (v. 3b).
  - a. He will come as a thief upon these sleeping saints.
  - b. He will come against their stupefied simplicity and sloth in judgment unspecified but terrifying.
  - c. Perhaps the greatest tragedy will be their seeing the awful loss of usefulness to Christ, which was wholly unnecessary.
2. Christ turns to the few who had not compromised their testimony in the pagan culture (v. 4).
  - a. This verse gives us a clue to the cause of spiritual stupor—compromise, no matter how slight, because it enables the enemy to dim Christ's glory.
  - b. Walking in white refers to purity and victory in the Christian life (v. 5; see Heb. 12:1, 2, 12-17).

## Reflections

What a promise of glorious privilege! Who would not want to walk with Christ in White? Are you sleeping? (1 Thess. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:34; Rom. 13:11, 12).