

THE COMATOSE CHURCH - SARDIS

Rev. 3:1-6

THE CITY OF SARDIS

Sardis was a city exceedingly famed for its past wealth and splendor, but it had deteriorated greatly. Its greatness lay in the past. Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. It sat on a hill or mountain surrounded by steep cliffs almost impossible to scale with only one narrow way of approach. Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice because of its arrogance manifested in its lack of watchfulness (3:2-3). The city was also famous for its woolen, textile, and jewelry industry.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele/Artemis and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods. Yet note the following account of the actual moral conditions of this idolatry. Andrew Tate writes,

Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysos were practiced at the festivals held in her honour. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions... From this, you can see the obvious allusions to the historical setting in the Lord's words in 3:4-5. (J. Hampton Keathley, DTS)

THE CREDENTIALS

As with the previous letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, John identifies his charge from Jesus Christ (1:11) **"Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches..."**.

"He (Christ) who has the seven spirits of God..." Here we note the **perfect** ("seven spirits") Holy Spirit who **perfects** all things according to the will of God the Father.

The Communicating Power - Note the role of the Holy Spirit:

John **"was in the Spirit"** when he received his charge (1:10)

Christ has the perfect power of the Spirit...

Christ the Messiah had this same Spirit as the Son of Man on earth..."The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him..." (Isa. 11:1-5.)

Lastly...If anyone hears the message that Jesus has for Sardis...for Collierville...for us as individuals, it will be through the power of the Spirit...v. 6 "let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Called-out Pastors – "(He) has the seven stars..."

We have already learned (1:20) that the seven stars are to whom the letters are addressed. Though some disagree, we interpret the angels...the messengers...the spiritual leaders of those churches to be the pastors called of God to lead our churches today. He has them in His hands.

He is to be the Author of their messages...**The Authority** for their ministry...and **to whom they are Accountable** for the way they have served His church.

THE COMPROMISERS

While it is certainly possible that there are those in the church of Sardis that have never had a true salvation experience, it would seem that the message is directed mainly to those who have confessed Christ but have become carnal in their lifestyle.

The Revelation of the Spirit – "I know your deeds (works)..." The emphasis is not upon the multitude of the deeds by the church and the individual member, but the motivation behind the deed. Multiplication of deeds is not a measure of the Spirit. Jesus addresses not the quantity of deeds, but the quality in verse 3.

v. 3 "...for I have not found your deeds completed (fulfilled) in the sight of My God."

James addresses the need for works that are to be demonstrated by all believers, but works that are engendered and fulfilled by faith. **Jas. 2:17** "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead."

The essence of this part of the Lord's admonition, and the takeaway for us is, the Lord sees through **the smokescreen of deeds** to the lack of fire or faith that is to be the basis of all we do.

The Reputation in the World – "...that you have a name that you are alive..."

A reputation is the way others see us. So, to be respected by the world is to do a lot of good things and to make a good personal impression. To be honest, that is the chief endeavor of so many, to create the best image

possible. We won't take the time to delve into our motivation for the clothes, the dress, the cosmetics, the cars, the houses, etc., etc., we choose. Not that it's all bad...neither is money the root of all evil. **It is the love of it all that is evil**, especially if it is put before God, and especially, when we profess to be devoted to Christ.

Seemingly, the church at Sardis fit right in with the culture. It was alive in the world's view and must have demonstrated a great relationship with the community...but this was not a community "to be in bed with". The most vile of sins and debauchery was a part of the religious culture. **If religion establishes your lifestyle, the culture was indeed debased.**

The Reality Before God – "...but you are dead."

If our goal in life is to create the best possible world's reputation, we must expect to receive the world's reward's!

The TV program, The Walking Dead, comes to mind. I haven't watched it, but I've noticed that the depiction of the people are pale, gaunt, zombie-like creatures with worn, ragged clothes. That's the way a dead person may look to the world, but to God he may very well be the most handsome, well-dressed man in town, and have the loftiest of positions. The meaning of the term here refers to the inward, not the outward person.

"Dead" means separation...apart from God...without Christ...no spiritual life. **For the unbeliever, forever separated from God. For the carnal believer, they are separated from the fellowship with their Savior**, the essence of true joy and fruitfulness. One is dead to God, the other is dead to any power and purpose of God.

Jesus gives the provision for both in answering the Sadducees regarding the resurrection of the dead, Mt. 22:31-32 "...have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISSAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB?' He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

THE COMMANDS

Finishing well is the aim of every true believer and is often quoted as their primary desire. The statement is often used at funerals of outstanding Christians.

In fact, that is the emphasis of our Lord in His letters to the churches. He points out their sin and failures so that they might repent and complete the course that He has set before them. In so doing, they are preparing for the glorious kingdom of God that's ahead.

Jesus's instructions to the church at Sardis are that if your deeds/works are to be "completed/fulfilled in the sight of My God", these are the things you must do:

v. 2 "Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die..."

v.3 "So, remember what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent."

Relinquish your spirit and receive His Spirit – I have used the phrase to "relinquish your spirit" because one of the most detestable things I hear throughout the world today is the potential and superiority of the **human spirit**. It pervades our society as is particularly injurious to the psyche of our young people. **It is nothing more than a Satanic promotion of pride**, the sin that God hates most. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the perverted mouth, I hate." Pr.8:13. "Pride goes before destruction..." Pr. 16:18.

If we are to be available for God to do **His reclamation** of our lives, we must forsake the control of the human spirit and its priorities within us, and give over to the governance of the Holy Spirit and His power.

Revitalize the things that remain – Many of us are passed the age of building muscles, but we can strengthen what we have! Those of the Sardis church particularly the carnal, and we as well, are instructed to look deeply into who they are as professing Christians...to assess the right standing of the child of God and the take notice of their past blessing, and to realize that the Lord can "redeem the years that the locusts have eaten".

Remember what you have received – Remember that time when you gave over to the beckoning of the Spirit and received the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord. **Recall your devotion to Him and your dedication to His service**. Those were the times of fellowship in the Lord and the fulfillment of joy in your salvation. That was the time when the peace of God was far more than any worldly pursuits have provided...or will provide.

Reactivate what you have heard – The admonition is to not only recall what you have received of the Lord, but to **"keep it" or to hold fast to it**. Rev. 1:3 "Blessed is he who hear the words of prophecy, and heed (or keep) the things which are written in it...". Remembering is of little value unless the truths and promises are exercised.

I Jn. 2:4-6 "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever

keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

Repent – The last of the commands is to repent. **Does repentance come first or last in this series of admonitions?** The answer is **YES!** Repentance is a change that begins with genuine conviction, leading to confession of disobedience, and is consummated with conforming actions of obedience. Just to remember and even to rejoice for a time does not mean that all is reconciled before God. The results show it.

Response – v.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.” The Lord Jesus was very diligent in stressing the importance their condition and His soon coming. Many have put off momentous decisions because of their own calendar of events. The specifics of this event, however, is only on God’s calendar. To not heed the commands of Jesus means death to the unbeliever in the church, and embarrassment for the dead relationship of the carnal believer. **What a way to go...to face the Savior who gave His life for the salvation, the grace that was taken for granted.**

THE COMMITTED

The Lord always has His remnant, “...a few people in Sardis...” v. 4. He recognizes them by their good deeds in the sense of their purity, their worthy walk, and eventually by name.

The Worthy Walk – “The few...who have not soiled their garments...they will walk with Me in white (v.4). He who overcomes will be...clothed in white garments (v.5)...”

In the face of such evil as was the case in Sardis...and in our world today...Jesus commends those who have walked faithfully with Him in this world. Unlike the dead, their deeds have been the works of righteousness with a personal devotion for the Lord. Not only have they walked with the Lord but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus points out **the apparel for a worthy walk**. To walk with Me, He says is to walk dressed in white. White, suggesting purity, holiness, set apart from the world, and **a dress rehearsal for what is to come.**

Rev. 19:7-8 “Let us rejoice and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in **fine linen, bright and clean (white)**; for **the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**”

The Written Record – “I will not erase his **name** from the book of life...” v. 5 The book of life is the written record of all who will have been saved through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is assumed that the rejection of Christ, will cause a person’s name to be stricken for the book, **only the saved to be permanently sealed and certified.**

Rev. 17:8 “And those who dwell upon the earth, whose name was not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast (Antichrist)...”

The Witness of the Savior – “I will confess his **name** before My Father and before His angels.” v.5

While this letter and the others are addressed to the churches, they are intensely personal. Notice the emphasis on the “**name**” in v. 5. There are many roll calls, honor rolls, halls of fame, etc., in this world, but **the greatest place for your name to be called will be by the Savior to His Father and His angels.** It is not to produce a sense of pride but gratitude. It will be joy unsurpassed to be recognized by our Savior...”to stand in the presence of His glory blameless and with great joy...” Jude 24. Surely it is a reminder for us to confess Him before this world.

“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.” Mt. 10:32

The Willing Ear – “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” v. 6

Interestingly, these words were never used by mortal man. They were only heard from the lips of Him Who spoke with Devine authority, and on earth only on seven distinct occasions. (Companion Bible) Mt. 7:29 “for He was teaching them as one having authority...”

All who will receive this message, must realize that it comes from the One Who has the Devine authority to teach. It will be heard only through the power of the Holy Spirit. **We must have the will to hear the will of God.**

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