

Sermon Mark S. Aites  
SERIES: 7 CHURCHES OF ASIA  
**SERMON #5: THE CHURCH IN SARDIS**

**TEXT: REV. 3:1-6**

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Continue our series with number 5 of the 7 churches of Asia.
2. In our previous lessons:
  - 1) We noted the great church in Ephesus, who greatly opposed false teachers and false doctrine, but whom left their first love.
  - 2) We learned then of Smyrna, and the persecution which was about to try them, and the Lord's admonition, "*Be thou faithful...*" (**Rom. 2:10**).
  - 3) We examined the church in Pergamos and noted their weakness in that some were holding to false doctrines. The Lord admonished them to purge out this falseness from among them, and to hold to the truth, that they might overcome.
  - 4) In our last lesson, we studied the fourth of these congregations, the church in Thyatira.
    - 1) The Lord commended them for several things, even twice for their works; apparently they were a growing congregation.
    - 2) But one identified as Jezebel needed to be dealt with that her false doctrine would be removed from their midst.
    - 3) The admonition for them, like Pergamos, was to overcome.
3. In this lesson we begin looking at the church in Sardis.
4. Sardis was located in W. Central Asia Minor some 100 miles from the Mediterranean sea; about 30 -35 miles south east of Thyatira.
5. It was located on the northern ridge of Mt. Tmolus, some 1500 ft over the the Hermus or Pactolus River.
6. It is reported that there were sheer walls on 3 sides making the city virtually impregnable.
7. In history prior to the first century, it was an extremely wealthy city.
  - 1) It was in fact the ancient capital of Lydia.
  - 2) History shows that they mined gold and that money was minted there.
  - 3) The kings who ruled in this city were known for wealth, splendor, and luxury.
  - 4) In fact that it is said that Croesus' home would be valued today at 1/2 billion dollars.
8. The city did go through a fall in approx. 549-546 B.C., when Cyrus king of Persia took the city.
  - 1) Hailey: "Tradition says that a soldier found a crevice in the rock hill up which he led a band of soldiers to the summit, taking the city by surprise."
  - 2) Some 330 yrs later Antiochus the Great took the city in the same way.
  - 3) Twice, the city was taken as "a thief in the night."
9. The city had faced other disaster; as it was 1 of 7 cities destroyed by an earthquake in 17 A.D.
10. Tacitus states in his records that Tiberius used money out of the treasury, and remitted taxes for 5 years to help rebuild the city.
11. Swete in his writings says, "The church perhaps encountered in Sardis no special danger to her place; but the atmosphere of an old pagan city, heavy with immoral tradition of 8 centuries, was unfavorable to the growth of her spiritual life."
12. Staun in his works notes that the church and history of the city appear to have similarities:
  - 1) Each had a name that lived, but was dead.

- 2) Each fulfilled none of its works; both would promise but fail to execute.
  - 3) With each it was watch, or be surprised as by a thief; Sardis had been caught napping each time it was taken.
  - 4) It is implied that the garments of the church had been defiled with immorality, for which the city was noted.
13. Notice that our letter comes from one who identifies Himself as *"He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars..."*
- 1) 7 was the number of fulness, completion, or perfection.
  - 2) The same mentioned in **1:4**.
  - 3) It is a reference to the Holy Spirit.
  - 4) Jesus had the Spirit of God without measure.  
**John 3:34-35** *"For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."*  
**35** *"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand."*
14. The letter also comes from the one who has the 7 stars (**1:20**); i.e. messengers under His "control, guidance, and care."

## DISCUSSION:

### I. THE PRAISE (3:2,4).

- A. **2** *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God."*
- 4** *"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."*
- B. Notice that the admonition begins: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain."*
  1. The word *strengthen* meaning "to make stable"
  2. There were things which were ready to die; but they weren't dead! There was still life in this church!
  3. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: *"Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light"* (**Eph. 5:14**).
  4. An admonition perhaps also appropriate to Sardis.
- C. *"You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments..."*
  1. Hailey expressed it this way: "Finding a few with undefiled garments is like finding an oasis in a wind-blasted desert, or a refreshing shower in the midst of a drought."
  2. Despite the fact that the church was dead, there were still some there who were spiritually alive -- a righteous remnant.
  3. The Lord knows each of us collectively and separately.
- D. Some had defiled their garments.
  1. To defile is to pollute what has been cleansed by Christ.
  2. We are taught to keep ourselves unspotted from the world (**James 1:27**).
  3. **Jude 23** *"But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."*
- E. The word *garment* appears to be a metonymy, where one word stands for another; in this case the garment referring to one's life, deeds, and works.
  1. Some of them had soiled their lives with sin.

2. Our garments are spoken of as being white when we've been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb.
  3. **Isa. 1:18** *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*
  4. In **Rev. 6 and 7** the righteous are clothed in white robes.
  5. Songs Of The Church, #674: "Are your garments spotless? Are they as white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"
- F. The Lord says that those who had not defiled their garments...*"they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."*
- G. Sardis did have its good points, but it was over-shadowed by the bad.

## **II. THE PROBLEM.**

- A. **3:1** *"...I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."*
1. The general consensus was that they had a name; that is they had a known reputation.
  2. Taylor: "Reputation is what others think us to be; character is what God knows us to be."
  3. This conveys an important message to us, that the church can have a good reputation among men and yet be a spiritual wasteland.
  4. Too often we are concerned with how others view the church instead of how God views the church.
  5. "Many churches today have a reputation of soundness and activity, but inwardly are decaying and dying." (Hailey)
  6. Friends, this is a reason for concern. We need to be sure that we are complying with God's will and not man's!
- B. **3:2** There were some things *"ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God."*
1. It was clear that unless they took action and repented of their wrongs the result would be death; in this case separation from doing that which is right, resulting in a dead church.
  2. This was not the time for procrastination.
  3. Too often things that need to be done are neglected and the results are tragic.
- C. *"I have not found your works perfect before God."*
1. *Perfect* -- suggests completeness.
  2. Apparently they started out strong, doing good works, but they wavered or faltered; they failed to persevere.
  3. In contrast to Sardis, Jesus had finished the work God had given Him to do (**John 17:4**).
  4. Too often: churches begin the works of God, but stray from those works.
  5. Some try to ride on the reputation of the church of the past; but the truth cannot be hid from God.
  6. The concern is for what is the church known now; not 15 or 20 yrs ago.
  7. Sardis was apparently trying to ride on the reputation of the past; but was suffering from neglect and indifference.

## **III. THE PRESCRIPTION.**

- A. **3:2** *"Be watchful."*
1. The cities history may have application here.
    - 1) Because of the neglect and carelessness, the city had fallen twice.
    - 2) The exhortation from scripture over and over again is to be vigilant and watchful.
  2. **Matt. 24:42** *"Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."*
  3. **1 Cor. 16:13** *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."*
  4. **1 Pet. 4:7** *"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."*
  5. **1 Pet. 5:8** *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."*
- B. *"...and strengthen the things which remain..."*
1. Stabilize them.
  2. Work diligently to keep things going.
- C. **Rev. 3:3** *"Remember therefore how you have received and heard..."*
1. They were encouraged to remember when they first had heard the gospel; to remember when the church was first established.
  2. The call for remembrance was likely because when they first heard it, they were determined to obey it.
  3. Let's make some individual application here:
    - 1) Remember when you first obeyed the gospel.
    - 2) Remember the enthusiasm, the willingness to serve the risen Savior.
    - 3) The fire which burned in our souls to carry forth the banner of truth.
    - 4) Perhaps there is a need this evening for you to remember.
- D. *"...hold fast and repent..."*
1. Realizing the past, the Lord emphasizes the need for change.
  2. Greek: lit. -- "to turn at once."
  3. They needed to return and hold to the truth; to hold to God's unchanging hand.

#### **IV. THE PROMISE.**

- A. **3:3** *"...Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."*
- B. The city had fallen twice before by a "thief in the night."
1. A failure to repent would bring judgment upon them.
  2. This is not a reference to the 2nd coming; but a judgment upon this congregation.
  3. Earlier, Ephesus was also warned with judgment: **2:5** *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent."*
- C. *"...and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."*
1. This passage conveys the element of surprise.
  2. **Matt. 24:42** *"Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."*
  3. **1 Thess. 5:2** *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."*
  4. The thief does not announce the time of his coming; something which Sardis understood all too well.
- D. People today would do well to remember that the return of Christ will be as a thief in the night.

1. Even Jesus did not know of the hour appointed for His return (**Matt. 24:36**).
  2. But that time has been set; God has already appointed the day in which He will judge the world... (**Acts 17:31**).
  3. Our task is to be sure we are ready for that day to come.
- E. **3:5** *“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments...”*
1. Suggested: White symbolizes purity, righteousness, and victory. (Taylor)
  2. This could only be possible if one has been cleansed of the stain of sin.
  3. Only possible if one continues to walk in the light, as He is in the light... (**1 John 1:7**).
- F. If you recall our study with Pergamos, we were reminded of the symbolism of white.
1. The 24 elders around the throne of God are in *white robes* (**Rev. 4:4**).
  2. In **Rev. 6** the conqueror is riding on a white horse.
  3. In **Rev. 7**, John sees in a vision souls *“standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands”* (**7:9**).
  4. And then the Son of man Himself, the Word of God, He who is faithful and true riding upon a white horse in victory (**Rev. 19-21**).
  5. The entire book stressing that the pure will overcome, just as Jesus conveys it in **Rev. 2:17** with the white stone.
  6. This section reminds us that nothing defiled can enter heaven.
  7. **21:27** *“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life”* (**Rev. 21:27**).
  8. **Matt. 5:8** *“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”*
- G. Today there are far too many which try to rely upon their own moral goodness to obtain the heavenly home.
1. They don't realize that because all sin (**Rom. 3:23**); that they need the blood of Christ to remit that sin.
  2. We only fool ourselves when we think that our goodness merits salvation (**Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10**).
- H. *“...and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life...”* (**3:5**).
1. Moses spoke of this book. **Exod. 32:32** *“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”*
  2. The phrase *“Book of life”* actually occurs some 7 times in the N.T.; 6 times in Revelation and once in **Phil. 4:3**.
  3. Jesus also made reference to the recording of names; **Luke 10:20** *“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”*
  4. Things are written so that things are not forgotten..
  5. But God does not possess physical form (**John 4:24**).
  6. And God is not subject to human weaknesses or frailties.
  7. As a human being, I frequently forget things; I've often joked that if my head weren't attached I'd forget where I left it.
  8. But God does not forget things like I do; save those things which He promises to forget:  
**Heb. 8:12** *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”*

9. The book of life is not an actual book, in the sense which we think of books. It exists in the mind of God.
10. *"The Lord knows who are His"* (2 Tim. 2:19).
11. Jesus, in **John 10:11**, identifies Himself as the "Good Shepherd."  
**John 10:14** *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."*
- I. The Lord then continues: **Rev. 3:5** *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."*
  1. This is the absolute height and joy of the victory which we have in Jesus.
  2. Earlier, in Jesus' public ministry: (**Matt. 10:32-33**).
  3. **Matt. 25:21** *"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"*

## V. THE APPLICATION.

- A. Deadness in a church begins with her members.
  1. As we have noted it is possible to be deceived into thinking that a church is alive, when it is in fact dead.
  2. The same holds true with individual members.
  3. **James 1:22** *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*
  4. **2 Cor. 13:5** *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"*
- B. If you recognize that you haven't been doing what you know you should do; that your faith is not what it once was, then perhaps this is a time for revival.
  1. Sardis allowed itself to be a dead church through neglect.
  2. Don't neglect your own soul as well.
  3. **Phil. 2:12** *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*
- C. Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life?
  1. Songs Of The Church #219: "Lord, I care not for riches, neither silver nor gold; I would make sure of heaven, I would enter the fold; In the book of Thy kingdom, with its pages so fair, Tell me Jesus my Savior, Is my name written there?" Lord my sins are many, like the sands of the sea, But Thy blood O my Savior, is sufficient for me; For Thy promise is written in bright letters that glow, 'Tho your sins be as scarlet, I will make them like snow."  
Chorus: Is my name written there, on the page white and fair? In the book of Thy kingdom, Is my name written there?"

**CONCLUSION:** Has your name been written in heaven? Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ to have that blessed privilege of going to heaven?