

Revelation Chapter 3 Handout

Sardis

Sardis was about 50 miles east of Smyrna and 30 miles south east of Thyatira. It was a wealthy city and most of the city practiced pagan worship with its mystery cults and secret religious societies. It had a magnificent temple of Artemis. Its people were idolaters and worshipped the mother goddess, Cybele, which included orgies during festivals held in her honor. Sardis thought it was secure but twice in the history of Sardis the acropolis had fallen to the enemy due to lack of vigilance of its defenders (Mounce). This was a city where wool dying was prominent. It also had a necropolis (a cemetery of 1000 hills) which in many ways reminded people that this was a city whose glory was past...it had been eclipsed by newer and more prosperous towns.

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead

The words of him - We return to the idea of Jesus being the one who holds all things in his hands. He is also the one who knows all things (seven spirits) and has control of all things (seven stars).

There is no commendation because there was nothing to commend. The contrast of the word alive and dead is a stinging rebuke, intended to wake them up. Just as the city was living on its past glory, the church had the outward form of religion (past glory) but had lost the inward reality of Christ in them. The next verse shows them not to be completely dead, but rather asleep.

. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent.

Wake up - The situation is not hopeless. They are asleep and so not quite dead. There is a chance to wake up. In a sense they are on life support. They had works but the works were those of show and not of deep and abiding faith. They were going through the motions.

Remember - They had forgotten the very basic gospel message of loving God and loving others in Jesus Christ. This was a life transforming call. It called them to be different from the city in which they lived. They were to be counter cultural. They were blending back into the society out of which they had been called.

Repent - The command was to turn around and return to moving in the direction in which they had been going as believers.

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.

Thief - The image of God's return is one of a sudden arrival when no one is watching. Jesus will come and steal what they thought they had. The city had twice not been vigilant and had lost everything. Now the people of Christ had forgotten to keep watch over their lives and now they are at risk as well.

4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Still a few persons - There is a reminder here that not all is lost. Not everyone has given in to the lures of the society. The image is of clothing that has not been cleaned. White has always represented holiness and purity. Faithfulness becomes the measure of whether our names are in the Lambs Book of Life. Part of this book lifts up the idea of personal accountability. We are called upon to make the choices necessary to remain faithful.

Confess your name before my Father - If we act appropriately then Jesus will confess our names before God. The angels are the heavenly court.

Philadelphia

Philadelphia was a strong fortress city. Its industries were wine, leather and textiles. The area however was very earthquake prone. In AD 17 the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Tiberius rebuilt it.

7" And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

Who opens and no one can shut - The major image here is the one of the door. The door here is into and out of the kingdom of God. To be saved means to be in the kingdom... in other words one is saved when one enters the kingdom of God's reign in Christ. So Jesus is the only one who is holy enough (perfect enough) and true enough (followed through on God's commands) to hold the key to the kingdom of David. No one else... individual, church or king has the power to open and shut the door.

8" I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying--I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

Yet you have kept my word - This is a church that has been faithful through much. They have managed to maintain their faithfulness and witness even when they have little power (no political or religious power... probably working class people). No one can stop them from gaining access to the kingdom because Christ alone has opened the door for them.

Synagogue of Satan - As the church began to grow with more and more Gentiles, and began to proclaim Jesus as both savior and Lord, the synagogues began to push them out and claim that the Christians were not followers of the true God. They slandered

the believers and tried to have them condemned by the Romans. What he means by "they say they are Jews but they are not" is that if they were truly Jews, God's people, they would be open to God's new revelation in Jesus Christ.

I will make them bow down at your feet - The Jews will bow down because at the end of time every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and since believers will reign with Christ, then those in the synagogue will bow down to them as well. It will be the presence of the believers with Christ that will show the Jews that Jesus loves them. There is also a promise that the members of the church will not have to suffer. This does not refer to physical suffering... the early church saw plenty of that. It refers to being spiritually sealed (we will see this occur in a few chapters) so that Satan cannot tempt the people away from Christ.

11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

Hold fast - Again there is reference to the second coming and a command to hold fast in order that no one could take away the winners crown of victory.

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

I will make you a pillar - The importance of the pillar is that pillars are often the only part of buildings left standing after earthquakes. So the people will not be able to be moved and the church of God will stand upon them as the solid pillars of faith.

You will never go out of it - They will never go out of it because it is Christ who will give them the strength to stay in.

Name - The people will receive three names. They will receive the name of God...meaning they belong to God. They will become the new Jerusalem, they will be the place in which the Holy one will dwell. Philadelphia had been renamed several times, and now the believers would be renamed to become a new people. They will be named for Jesus who is the one who holds the keys to the doors. They will be able to enter in because they have his mark.

Laodicea

The city had a profitable business from the production of black wool cloth and when it was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60 it was able to rebuild itself without outside help. It had a widely known medical school and produced an eye-salve (Mounce). It got its water from hot springs almost 6 miles away and by the time it got to Laodicea it would have been lukewarm. It was also a center for banking. The people were zealous for nothing, because they had everything. They had learned how to compromise to get along. The church lived within this affluent society and the attitudes of its citizens rubbed off onto the church.

14" And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

The words of the Amen - Jesus as described as the Amen (the truth teller), the faithful one (the one who was able to live faithfully even to the cross... something his followers were supposed to be), the one who was the true witness (who was willing to speak the truth even in the face of opposition), and the origin of God's creation (the one who was there at the beginning of all that there is... based on the first chapter of John's Gospel)

15 "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

Either cold or hot - The city was known for its warm springs... these were neither hot or cold. They were also brackish and smelled. No one would want to drink the water so it was pretty useless. The water in fact would induce vomiting if consumed. So the people were as useless as the water. They were not hot in order to be faithful and true witnesses. They were not cold so that their hearts might be converted. Like the city they were zealous for nothing.

17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

I am rich - Again remember that the city was so wealthy that they did not have to depend on anyone or anything. As with many people today, the more money they have the less they think they need to depend on God. Jesus reminds them that they are just the opposite. By not being useful to the kingdom of God they have nothing. Material goods do not make one rich. So each reference is to the city wretched (the city was proud), pitiable (the city was envied), poor (the city was very rich), blind (the city had healing springs and medical school) and baked (the city was known for its clothing).

18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Therefore I counsel you - Jesus offers an alternative to each of those conditions. He points out that he and he alone is the way to life that really matters.

19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

Those whom I love - Jesus has not given up on them. He always desires repentance and new life. He offers them the chance to respond to his and promises to be intimate fellowship with him... eating together.

21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

***To the one who conquers** - Jesus helps them to understand what it means to conquer. Those who conquer are those who remain faithful and true...both living and witnessing to the truth, which is what Jesus did by obeying God and going to the cross. Faithfulness for Revelation means being faithful in all areas of life. It is not merely believing, but living. Those who manage such a feat will get to reign with Christ.*