

SECTION 8

Text 3:1-6

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that livest, and thou art dead. 2 Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 4 But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. 5 He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Initial Questions 3:1-6

1. Is it possible to be a very active and successful congregation and yet be spiritually dead?
2. What can you tell about a congregation who starts many worthy projects and finishes none of them - vs. 2?
3. Where in the Gospel records can we find the same warning as given here in vs. 3 - in the earthly ministry of Christ?
4. What do the "white garments of vs. 5 signify?
5. What is the "Book of Life" - vs. 5?

The Church in Sardis

Chp. 3:1-6

The Church in Sardis received the most complete condemnation from her Lord, of the seven Churches. They are in a very serious spiritual condition, and they are consequently in grave danger of the Lord's judgment. He might come to judge Sardis as a "thief in the night" (Thess. 5:2) unexpectedly. There is only a small remnant at Sardis who shall share in Christ's triumph.

Sardis was the capitol of ancient Lydia until 549 B.C. The ruins of her great temple to the goddess Cybele is still observable. A small village exists today near the site of ancient

Sardis, its name is Sert. Ancient Sardis was wealthy from the gold and silver which she found in her rivers and hills.

Verse 1

The Lord addresses this congregation as He did the others. Christ told them that "you have (*echeis* - sing. pres. ind. - you have at present) a name that you are alive (*zēs* sing. pres. ind. alive now) but you are dead (*nekros* - i.e., pres. ind. dead right now). How is it possible that a congregation can think that it is alive and in reality it is dead? Is it possible that a large active church can be actually spiritually dead?

Verse 2

"Be thou (imperative - they were commanded to be watching) constantly watching and establish (*sterison* - 1st aor. act. imp. through one final act get the complete remaining things established) the remaining things that or which were about to die." Next, comes the most serious indictment of all to this very busy congregation. "For I have not found any of your works having been fulfilled (*peplē rōmena* - perf. pass. participle means - you started a lot of things but you never finished a single thing) before my God (literally God of me).

Verse 3

What could Christ say to a congregation that never finished anything it started? He commanded them to "remember" (see 2:5) how you have received (*eilēphas* - perfect tense - means that they had permanently received) and did hear (*ēkousas* - aor. tense - means the single act of hearing) and keep (*tērei* - pres. imp. commanded to keep on keeping) and repent (*metanoēson* - 1st aor. imper. commanded to completely repent in a single final act). Christ told them that (literally) "If therefore you do not watch, I will come as a thief, and you by no means know at what hour I will come on you."

Verse 4

The *alla* (but) is to contrast the general lack of spiritual concern and "the few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments." They were very careful, like Bunyon (in *Pilgrim's Progress*) not to soil their white robes. "They shall walk around with me in white (garments - not in text); because they are worthy." They are worthy, because of their close walk with

Christ - not through any self-righteousness. Christ is their righteousness!

Verse 5

Who are going to receive the white garments of righteousness? Christ responds immediately - "The one continually overcoming thus shall be clothed (to throw around) in white garments." These names alone will remain in "the scroll of eternal life." I will confess (*homologēsō* - future ind. act.)

Verse 6

Same Conclusion as the other Churches.

Review Questions

1. What did Christ mean by charging the Church of Sardis with being "dead" - vs. 1?
2. What are some of the spiritual implications of the charge?
3. Had Sardis really *received* the Word of God - vs. 3?
4. What does vs. 2 tell us about how the Word of God is to be handled by Christians - vs. 3?
5. What do we learn about the need for Christian growth - vs. 5?

SECTION 9

Text 3:7-13

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth: 8 I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. 9 Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. 12 He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the

name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Initial Questions 3:7-13

1. What is the relationship between God's purpose and will and human efforts - vs. 7?
2. What is the "synagogue of Satan" - vs. 9?
3. What is the relationship between our loyalty to God and the availability of His power in times of trial - vs. 10?
4. What are the spiritual results for those that overcome - vs. 12?

The Church in Philadelphia Chp. 3:7-13

The congregation of the Lord in the city of brotherly love was the only one of the seven churches which was not condemned by Christ. Philadelphia was the second most important city in Lydia. It was situated southeast of Sardis. Under heavy persecution this congregation had remained loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence the Lord had "caused a door to be opened." This Church kept the Faith!

Verse 7

Christ is "the holy one," "the true one," the one having the key of David." Christ is the separated one. He is separated from sin, but not the repentant sinner. He is set apart to do the will of His father. The term *hagios* means holy in the sense of separation. In Isaiah, chp. 6:1ff we read of the thrice holy God of Israel.

The Greek language has two words which can be translated true (first one is *alēthes*, second is *alēthinos*). The first word is applied to propositions or assertions which are either true or false, depending on the actual state of affairs. The second term means true in the sense of genuine. The word is formed with an *a privative* which makes the word mean to uncover or to reveal to the observer whether or not something is real or spurious - i.e., claiming to be true when it is not. The term true is one of the central words in all of John's works.

The third title comes from a quotation from Isaiah 22:22. This messianic use of this O.T. background enables Christians to be in the presence of the living God.