

"The Seven Churches Of Asia -- Part Two"

Revelation 3 Notes

The Church At Sardis (vss. 1-6)

- In the sixth century B.C. Sardis was one of the most powerful cities of the ancient world. Yet it had declined to the point that Ramsay could appropriately describe it as "a relic of the period of barbaric warfare, which lived rather on its ancient prestige than on its suitability to present conditions."
- The exhortations to watchfulness would carry special weight in Sardis because twice in its history the acropolis had fallen to the enemy due to a lack of vigilance on the part of the defenders. In 549 B.C. Cyrus captured the acropolis by deploying a climber to work his way up a crevice on one of the nearly perpendicular walls of the mountain fortress. Late in the third century the city was again captured in the same way.
- Although Sardis could be pronounced dead, it still had the possibility of restoration to life. It is to strengthen what still remains though it is at the point of death. Christ, who knows their works, has not found any of them carried out fully. The members at Sardis lacked the appropriate motivation and spiritual orientation without which all external activity is impotent.
- The church is called upon to bear in mind what they had received and heard and to keep it. If they do not wake up to its perilous position, Christ will visit them in judgment. In other New Testament passages where the coming of Christ is said to be like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), the final judgment is in view. John does not, however, have the final judgment in mind here.
- Since the manufacture and dyeing of woolen goods was a principal trade in Sardis, an allusion to defiled garments would be immediately recognized. They are "worthy" in the sense that they have withstood the pressure to fall away.
- The idea of a divine ledger is first mentioned in Exodus 32:32-33 (cf. Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1). All ancient cities kept a civic register in which the names of the citizens were inscribed. Confessing His name before the Father reminds us of Matthew 10:32 (cf. Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8). Faithfulness in trial now is to be rewarded beyond measure in the life to come.

The Church At Philadelphia (vss. 7-13)

- Philadelphia is located at the juncture or trade routes leading to Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia and helped it earn the title "gateway to the East" and made it a city of commercial importance. Its one major drawback was that it was subject to earthquakes. The devastating earthquake of A.D. 17 which leveled twelve cities of Asia overnight had been particularly severe on Philadelphia.
- "The key of David" is a metaphorical expression indicating complete control over the royal household. It means the undisputed authority to admit or exclude from the New Jerusalem. This may be an intentional contrast with the practice of the local synagogue in shunning Christian Jews.
- A "door" indicates opportunity, an opening through which a goal could be achieved. As the city was an open door for the spread of Greek civilization, so now the Lord had opened a door of evangelism to the church in that city.
- The Jewish population was convinced that by national identity and religious heritage it was the people of God. Not so, claimed the Christians. Christians are now called "the Israel are God" (Galatians 6:16). By their slander and persecution of Christians they have shown themselves to be the "synagogue of Satan."
- Because the church was faithful to Christ in time of trial that He in turn will be faithful to them in the time of their great trial (John 17:15). The church will have its trials which test faith, but it will be kept from trials which would affect the earthlings, the world of the unregenerated.
- The promise of keeping these safe implies and imposes continuous steadfastness by the saints. The thought does not concern itself with gain to the taker, but with loss to the loser. The crown may be forfeited by any individual who grows careless, complacent, self-satisfied, overconfident or who neglects opportunity and duty.
- "Pillar" conveys the idea of stability and permanence. To a city that had experienced devastating earthquakes which caused people to flee into the countryside and establish temporary dwellings there, the promise of permanence within the New Jerusalem would have a special meaning.

The Church At Laodicea (vss. 14-21)

- In Roman times Laodicea became the wealthiest city in Phrygia. The fertile ground of the Lycus valley provided good grazing for sheep. It was known for its medical school and two of its most famous medicines were an ointment from spice nard for the ears and an eye-salve made from "Phrygian powder" mixed with oil. Laodicea's major

weakness was its lack of an adequate and convenient source for water.

- As a personal designation, "Amen" would indicate the One in whom perfect conformity to reality is exemplified. It presents the trustworthiness of Christ in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of the Laodicean church.
- The church in Laodicea was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick. It was totally ineffective, and thus distasteful to the Lord. It should be noted that although the Lord was about to spew them out of His mouth, there was yet opportunity to repent.
- The smug satisfaction of the Laodiceans is countered with the counsel that they make some purchases in those specific areas in which they are confident that no need exists. The gold is spiritual wealth that has passed through the refiner's fire and has been found to be totally trustworthy. In the biblical world nakedness was a symbol of judgment and humiliation. Confident of their clear vision into spiritual matters, the Laodiceans needed, as if were, their own eye-salve to restore sight.
- If they are to come safely through the approaching ordeal, they must recognize their essential poverty and open their doors to the knocking Christ, whose power reaches its full strength in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). It has never been the practice of God to storm the ramparts of the human heart. In oriental lands the sharing of a common meal indicated a strong bond of affection and companionship. Supping with Him now is a foretaste of the glory to be shared with Him in the eternal home.
- The context of "sit with me in my throne" seems to be speaking of us presently sitting and reigning with Christ. The faithful share with Him in this life and His victory over sin and in His reign in righteousness, and shall also share in the reign for ever and ever in eternity.