

Lesson # 8 -- The People of Jesus Christ at Sardis.

Introduction

- A. As we study these letters to the seven churches we are reminded of the description of believers given by the apostle Peter. He said we are "scattered strangers" (I Peter 1:1). From reading these early chapters of the Revelation we recognize the truth of Peter's account. We may be here on earth -- but our citizenship is really in Heaven.
- B. We also see the validity of Peter's warnings. He said, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (2:11). It is obvious that many of the Christians then did not heed his warning and many of us today make the same mistake.
- C. The Scripture: Revelation 3:1-6.

I. The Introduction to the Church at Sardis.

- A. Sardis was located about 30 miles south of Thyatira. Throughout her history she was characterized, not only for wealth, but for a lack of vitality.
- B. The history of Sardis was more interesting than her present. She was originally built on the top of a ridge about eight hundred feet high. Since the sides of the ridge were very steep the city was easy to defend. Twice, however, the city was taken because the soldiers had become so overconfident no guard was posted.
- C. At the time John wrote this letter to the church at Sardis the city was built around the bottom of her high hill. She had none of her historic splendor. Her only bid for importance had to do with the ability of her citizens to dye wool.

II. The Titles of the Lord Jesus.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.
Rev. 3:1

- A. The explanation of these titles.
 - 1. When the Savior spoke of Himself as "having the seven Spirits of God" He was reminding the Christians in Sardis of the abundance of the provision He had made for them. The number seven probably speaks of the completeness of the work of the Holy Spirit. This subject is one of the most important in the New Testament.

2. Throughout these letters the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as holding the seven stars (pastors) in His hand (1:16,20; 2:1, 3:1). The close connection in this verse between the Holy Spirit and the pastors puts the emphasis again on the provision God has made for His people. When He designed the church He established her leadership through whom the Holy Spirit would work in the exposition of the Bible so every believer would constantly receive divine help.

B. The application of these titles.

1. The blessed Holy Spirit is the unusual gift the Lord Jesus has given to every believer. The prophecy regarding the Savior was "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Matt. 3:11
2. Through the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus every believer receives the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (Acts 2:38; I Cor. 12:13). He comes to teach us the Bible, enable us to live an obedient and fruitful life, and thereby glorify the Lord Jesus (John 16:13,14; Rom. 8:13-16; Acts 1:8). Our privilege is to live in His fullness (Eph. 5:18).
3. The relationship of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the church is very important. While the Holy Spirit dwells in each of us we must never minimize God's provision in the church. It is here that we can be taught, in ways that go beyond our own study, join in worship and praise, as well as finding sources of fellowship and service.
4. It is evident the church at Sardis had neglected the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Word, as well as the divinely ordained place of the pastor and church. We must not make the same mistake.

III. The Admonition of the Lord Jesus.

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Rev. 3:1

A. The explanation of this admonition.

1. When the Lord Jesus spoke of the church at Sardis having "a name that thou livest" He may have been referring to their past reputation or to the fact that they called themselves a "church." Whatever the case may have been their present condition was a contradiction.
2. The abrupt words "and art dead" is a sorry indication of the spiritual condition of their church. The purpose God had in establishing a church at Sardis was not being realized. It is evident that a group of people were meeting and thought they were the true church -- but they were dead.

3. To understand the Biblical concept of the church we must recognize that the church is a divine institution -- a spiritual organism -- characterized by the proclamation of the Word, celebration of the ordinances, worship, edification, and evangelism.
4. It would seem that this church gathered together, sang hymns, heard preaching, etc., but their activity did not result in worship, praise, edification, etc.

B. The application of this admonition.

1. We must first of all apply these words of the Lord Jesus to our own life.
 - a. Are we true believers?
 - b. Have we failed to grow so that our past has the marks of a spirituality we no longer enjoy?
 - c. Are we living as an inconsistent Christian -- out of the will of God -- so that we have lost the blessing of God?
2. We must apply this admonition to the church we attend -- without being critical or doing this evaluation from solely our own viewpoint.
 - a. Does my church give the rightful place to the Word of God, the ordinances, worship, edification, and evangelism?
 - b. Does my church have the Biblical marks of spirituality?

IV. The Counsel of the Lord Jesus.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Rev. 3:3

A. The explanation of this counsel.

1. The exhortations revolve around five important areas.
 - a. "Be watchful" -- pay attention to what is happening. Compare yourself and your church with the Biblical model.
 - b. "Strengthen the things which remain" -- become involved in undergirding the spirituality of your life and church.

- c. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard" -- think back to the time of your salvation, recall those early days of rapid spiritual growth, review those enjoyable times when you were first united with the church.
- d. "Hold fast" -- do not allow the model of those early days to slip away from you. Assume the responsibility to retrace your steps and to help others in the church to do the same.
- e. "Repent" -- treat your present condition as a sin. Do not allow yourself to blame it on the pastor, circumstances, your health, or your family. Get down on your knees, confess your spiritual level as sinful, ask God to help you -- and do it whether you feel like it or not or even want to. Repent because I tell you to -- for your own good.

2. The warning.

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Rev. 3:3

- a. This warning takes on a special meaning -- when we remember that in the history of Sardis the city was twice captured by her enemies because the soldiers neglected to set a watch.
- b. The Lord Jesus said He would come to judge the believers at Sardis. He undoubtedly meant that He would remove the candlestick -- whereby He would allow the church to fully die out (2:5).

3. The promise.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Rev. 3:4-6

- a. The promise to the spiritual believers in Sardis and to the overcomer is that they would walk with the Lord Jesus clothed in white. The white raiment is spoken of at least five times in this book (3:4,18; 4:4; 19:8,14). It is a symbol of righteousness (19:8). It is overwhelming to realize that the Lord Jesus invites every believer to a life of fellowship -- if they will live a righteous life. Can it be that our present life of unrighteousness is more important to us?
- b. The assurance that He will not blot out the name of the overcomer from the book of life but would confess his name in Heaven -- probably refers to the custom at the time of John of removing the name of a criminal from the registry of the city. By this he would forfeit all his rights and privileges. Every true believer can be assured that his name is in the Book of Life (John 10:28,29).

B. The application of this counsel.

1. These verses remind us of our personal obligation to obey the Word of God and to maintain our own spiritual life. While every one of us have assumed a measure of responsibility for our health, family, job, etc, our highest accountability has to do with our relationship with God.
2. The Lord Jesus must come first -- even before our family, job, and church. Nothing can be more important than our walk with Him. This is not based on the benefit we derive from such a life of fellowship -- but it is based on Who He is and that He is worthy of all the glory and honor that could be given to Him.
3. We must learn how to implement this counsel of our Savior in a very practical manner. We must "be watchful," "strengthen what remains," "remember," "hold fast," and "repent."
4. We must respond to His invitation to enter into a life of fellowship with Himself. If a well known leader in our nation would make us an offer like this -- we would immediately make all kinds of changes to take advantage of it. How can we explain our lethargy to even consider the invitation of the Lord Jesus? It is appropriate to ask the question again -- is our present life of unrighteousness more attractive to us? If it is -- what does that say about us?