Revelation Chapter 3--The Messages to the Churches Part 4

- At Ephesus we saw that all their good deeds did not make up for having left their *first love*--**Jesus**
- Smyrna personifies Tertullian's statement: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."
- The letter to Pergamum was a warning against compromise in doctrine, morals & teaching
- Thyatira: commended for love, faith & service; rebuked for compromise on immorality & idolatry

Revelation 3:1-6 To the Church in Sardis

- *Sardis*--35 miles SE of Thyatira; capital of Lydia & once a portrait of strength, fertility & wealth
  - Acropolis sited on a narrow spur of a plateau 1500 feet above the Hermus river valley
    - Nearby was a *necropolis* of ~150 stone burial chambers dating back to ~600 BC
    - 700 years prior, the king of Lydia ruled in splendor from one of the greatest cities in the world
    - Legendary wealth; River Pactolus below was said to have had gold-bearing waters (legend said "touched by Midas") as source of wealth; greatest king was Croesus => adage "as rich as Croesus"
    - Greek *Sardeis* is plural reflecting the separation of two localities--atop & below the plateau
    - After 17 AD earthquake, Tiberius helped rebuild the city, but it was never fully rebuilt
  - Substantially pagan known for immorality & extravagance; also had large Jewish presence
    - Started a temple to Artemis but never finished it; a failure to finish also characterized this church
  - Almost impregnable--3 vertical sides & the 4th very difficult; the apparent security actually led to complacency; city was captured twice (~549 & 218 BC) thru failing to keep adequate watch
    - Croesus heard from the oracle at Delphi: "If you cross the River Halys, you will destroy a great empire." He took that to mean he would defeat Cyrus the Great of Persia so he went forth to attack
      - Upon losing the battle he had such pride in his "impregnable" citadel that his forces failed to keep watch; the Persians found a way up to take the city => the empire he destroyed was his own
    - Today the plateau & city site have been substantially eroded; some good videos on YouTube
  - When John wrote Revelation the city was still very wealthy; known for wool & degeneracy
    - Ramsay[1] cited Sardis as ultimate example of contrast between past splendor & present decay
- *v1a Church in Sardis*--another church that had compromised with the world; **no commendation**
  - *Holds*--reveals both Jesus' divine authority & His intimate presence with the Church
  - *Seven spirits*--7-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit (**Isaiah 11:2**); the spiritually dead need the:
    - Spirit of the Lord: the leading presence of the Holy Spirit, guiding believers & the church in all matters of faith & ministry
    - Spirit of Wisdom: enables discernment & ability to apply knowledge rightly in decision-making & spiritual growth; only the wisdom of God can restore; the "wisdom" of the world dooms
    - Spirit of Understanding: provides insight into God's truth; must understand condition to correct it
    - Spirit of Counsel: guidance aligned with God's will, helping believers navigate life & ministry
    - Spirit of Might: grants strength & perseverance to overcome trials & fulfill God's calling
    - Spirit of Knowledge: illuminates God's purposes & deepens awareness of His plans
    - Spirit of Fear of the Lord: to rekindle reverence, obedience, devotion & awe of God
  - *Seven stars*--as we saw in *v1:20* "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches."
  - To those who match the churches to ages, the "Reformation Church" (1517 to 1790 AD)
    - *Reputation*--for restoring gospel truths; *death*--spiritual decline & compromise that followed due to failure to fully separate from institutional & political structures
- *v1b, 2b* **Rebuke:** *Yet you are dead*--nominal Christians professing to live the Christian life
  - *v1b Deeds*--good reputation in the city with no mention of opposition from Jew or Gentile
    - (IMO) Likely relied more on their own views & strength than depending on the Holy Spirit
    - Their "Christianity" didn't threaten anyone's beliefs or conscience; a vital church following God's will & refusing to compromise with their values should expect strong reaction from the world

[1] Sir William Ramsay: British archaeologist & New Testament scholar; went to Turkey in 1880 to prove Luke's gospel & Acts were full of falsehoods. Found not one error & accepted Christ; became renowned for his writings on Paul & these letters to the churches.

- **Luke 6:26** Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers treated the false prophets in the same way.

➢ *Dead*--often equated to sin (**Luke 15:24; Romans 6:13; Ephesians 2:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:6**) but (IMO) here more like Ephesus thru lack of passion for Christ & adherence to God's Word

- **Caird**:[2] "The church everyone spoke well of, the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity, unable to distinguish between the peace of well-being and the peace of death." & "The majority had so fully compromised with the pagan environment that they were Christian in name only."

o *v2b Incomplete*--they were active but lacked the effectiveness only the Spirit could provide

➢ Their works were aimed more towards the world than towards God; like the city that couldn't finish a temple, this church couldn't maintain the faith & love of God that they needed

⇨ Another active church that believed they were "good Christians" but were near spiritual death

- *v2a, 3* **Exhortation:** Jesus is always looking for us to do something to bear fruit

o *Wake up/rouse yourself*--be watchful, unlike those who laxly let the impregnable city be taken

➢ We must be alert to the signs of the time & be active for God as Jesus said in **Matthew 24**

➢ We also must be on the watch against false teaching as Paul cautioned in **Acts 20:29-31**

o *Strengthen*--thru prayer & the Word; *remains*--any remnants of faith or love for Jesus

➢ Even the good in the church is being degraded to the point it is about to die

➢ They needed to reacquaint with & submit to God's Word with a receptive heart (**James 1:21**)

o *Remember*--(present imperative): *keep on remembering* God's promises & the Gospel of Jesus with the thrill you had when first you heard the Good News

o *Hold fast/keep it*--your faith & God's Word; requires action motivated by love for God

o *Repent*--be humble & turn back to God, for they had spurned much of His good grace & gifts

o **Warning:** *I will come*--not His 2nd coming but in judgment in a sudden & unexpected manner

⇨ There is still hope for a "dead" church if they repent, return to God's Word & heed the Holy Spirit

- *v4-5 A few*--still strong in the Lord; recalls when God told Elijah about the remnant in Israel

- **1 Kings 19:18** Nevertheless, I have reserved seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

o *Soiled*--forgetting God's promises & failing to depend on the Spirit's power led to defilement

➢ This church was no longer cooperating with the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification

➢ Spiritual death led to their garments not being washed in the blood of the Lamb

- **Hebrews 9:22** According to the law, in fact, nearly everything must be purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

o *Walk with me*--an honor & reward for faithful service signifying friendship & relationship

➢ Like Enoch with God (Genesis 5:24) & "Companions of the Garden" with the Persian king

o *Overcomes*--not just believing but winning the spiritual warfare versus forces against that belief

➢ To win you must be armed with the full armor of God & pray in the Spirit (**Ephesians 6:10-18**)

o *White*--sign of holiness & purity, such as Christ (transfiguration--**Mark 9:3**), angels (at the tomb--**Mark 16:5**), martyrs (*v6:11*), redeemed (*v7:9,13*) & the glorified church (*v19:8,14*).

➢ White robes may stand for the resurrection bodies awaiting the redeemed

➢ In the ancient world, white robes commonly stood for victory & celebration, but that was an external showing; for Christians what matters is the condition of the heart/soul

o *Book of Life*--contains those numbered amongst the faithful in God's Kingdom

➢ Mentioned numerous times (e.g.; **Exodus 32:32-33; Daniel 12:1 Psalm 69:28; Revelation 21:27**)

➢ Ancient kings kept a register of citizens; deceased & criminals were erased from that register.

o *Confess*--Jesus also promised to do so while instructing His Apostles (**Matthew 10:32-33**)

⇨ *v6 Says to the churches*--reminder that all 7 letters were for all churches to read

⇨ The Sardians surely thought they were alive in Christ; can we be satisfied with our own status quo?

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[2] George Bradford Caird (1917-1984)--British Congregational minister, theologian & respected biblical scholar