

## 13. The Book of Revelation—3:1-2

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(8/12/20)

We are currently in the second major section of the Book of Revelation—chapters 2 & 3 which contain the 7 letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor.

Last week we finished chapter 2 looking at the Letter to the Church of Thyatira—the *idolatrous* church.

That brings us to chapter 3 and the Letter to the Church of Sardis—the *dead* church.

### **The Church of Sardis (the dead church)—v.1-6**

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#### **Revelation 3:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> "And to the angel [senior or lead pastor] of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**

#### **The Commission (background)**

##### **The City**

The city of Sardis was inland about 50 miles east of Ephesus.

At one time it had been the capital of Lydia, the province it was located in—and was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor.

It was built on an elevated plateau which rose sharply 1500 feet above the Hermus Valley.

On three sides of this plateau the rock walls rose straight up nearly perpendicular to the ground below and were smooth and absolutely unscalable.

The remaining side was a steep slope that consisted of jagged rocks so steep and treacherous that the people of Sardis considered their city to be impregnable, unconquerable—they believed that no invading army could ever take the city.

However, the city was taken twice—the first time by Cyrus of Persia in 549 BC.

Cyrus and his soldiers surrounded the city only to realize that it did seem impossible to take.

After two weeks of trying, he offered a reward to any of his soldiers who could find a way into the city.

One day one of his soldiers happened to notice a soldier up on the wall of the city of Sardis dropped his helmet down that very steep slope of the plateau.

Later, that afternoon he saw that same soldier ‘appear’ down the slope to retrieve his helmet after which he disappeared and reappeared up on top of the wall once again.

He was obviously using some path or passageway that could be used to climb up into the city and down from the city.

So that night, Cyrus’ soldier took a few guys and found that passageway which was a hidden crevice in the mountain plateau that they were able to make their way thru and climb up into the city.

When they got into the city to their amazement, they discovered that the whole city was sleeping—there wasn’t even any sentries guarding the city!

Apparently, they were so confident the city was impregnable and unconquerable that they let their guard down—and everyone went to sleep, and the city fell.

The city fell again in 218 BC when Antiochus, after a whole year of trying to find a way to defeat the city, had one of his soldiers find that same little secret pathway into the city and he too led a group of men at night up this treacherous little path and into the city and once again everyone was asleep and the city was left unguarded.

Apparently, the people of Sardis had forgotten their lesson—there was no one watching and once again Sardis fell because the people of Sardis were overconfident and apathetic.

After this a saying began to go around that Sardis was a city that was taken as a “*thief in the night*”.

Jesus picks up on their history and uses it to warn the church in Sardis that if they do not watch for His return and repent of their sins and their apathy and overconfidence—He would come upon them “**as a thief**” (v.3) catching them off guard and judge them.

In A.D. 17 Sardis was completely destroyed by an earthquake and was rebuilt by Tiberius, the Roman Emperor—but this time, not on top of the plateau but at the base of the mountain where 5 trade routes intersected.

Consequently, the city became extremely wealthy as it went on to become the center of the carpet and wool industry—so it went on to be a textile town.

Something else I thought was interesting—Sardis was called “*a cemetery of a thousand hills*” because 7 miles away you could see this huge acropolis that rose above the city on top of which stood the Temple of Cybele.

Cybele was just another name for *Dianna* whom the Ephesians worshipped—different cultures called her by different names—Isis, Venus and so on—she was a fertility goddess.

So, on top of the acropolis was the temple of Cybele—but also there was this cemetery with hundreds of mounds filled with tombstones that you could see from miles away—so you might say that “*death was a way of life in Sardis.*”

In fact, the city came to be associated with death because of this—it was identified with death.

And so Jesus drawing on this background says to the church there that they were also dead—**“You have a name but are dead” (v.1).**

Here was a church filled with people who claimed to be ‘*alive*’ spiritually but were actually dead—the church was populated with religious unbelievers by the time Jesus dictates this letter to them.

Paul indicted church goers like this when he said:

- “*They have a form of godliness...*”
- “*They profess to know God, but in works (the works of their lives, by the way they are living)—they deny knowing God...*”
- “*They say to Jesus, ‘Lord, Lord’—but don’t do the things He tells them...*” (because they aren’t born of the Spirit).

By the time Jesus dictated this letter to the church in Sardis the city was wealthy but degenerate.

Historians have said that at any given time you’d walk into the city back then, at any place in the city—you could hear people talking about its past glory.

The people sat around talking all day long about their past glory—but there was no life there, the city itself had become a ‘*corpse*’.

And sadly, the Christian church followed suit and had also lost *its* life and vitality and had become a *dead* church (a dead organization) instead of a *living* church (a living organism).

All they did was talk about their past glory, how great they used to be for God—but there was no present power or life.

→ Talk about ship discovered one hundred years ago floating in the Arctic Ocean which the newspapers called, “*A drifting sepulcher manned by a frozen crew.*”

How much of the Christian church does that title describe today?—some have called Christians “*the frozen chosen.*”

This church was not a *sanctuary* it was a mortuary where dead people offered up dead worship to God.

Jesus is here acting like a Divine Coroner Who is pronouncing this church dead.

It has been noted that the progression of life of a religious movement looks something like this: a man → a movement → a monument → a memorial (nothing more than a ‘tombstone’ marking a grave where there had once been life).

Sardis was already in the final stage.

The church of Sardis symbolically represents the period of Church history from the sixteenth thru the seventeenth centuries—a period referred to as the Protestant Reformation period.

Last week we studied the letter to the church of Thyatira which represented the period of church history from 600 to 1500 AD—the period called the medieval Roman Catholic period.

By this time, the Papal system was so corrupt that it was selling indulgences in order to finance a new church in Rome—St. Peter’s Basilica.

The RCC sold these indulgences to Roman Catholics whose loved ones had died as a way of lessening their time in purgatory; or if you wanted to sin you could go ahead and buy your forgiveness in advance... (we looked at that last week).

The RCC was making a fortune selling these indulgences.

Because of this and many other false doctrines and corrupt practices, Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, couldn't stand it any longer and so on Oct. 31, 1517 he nailed his "Ninety-Five Theses" (reforms) on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany which officially launched the Protestant Reformation.

Keep that in mind—I believe it's symbolically the background of this letter.

**Revelation 3:1 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God...**

Jesus introduces Himself here as the One possessing the “**seven Spirits of God...**”

There is only one Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:4), but the number seven demonstrates fullness and completeness.

What Jesus was saying is that, “*This dead church needs an infusion of the fullness of the Holy Spirit Who is life—and I am the One Who is holding that fulness and wants to pour it out on this or any other dead church.*”

The Hebrew word for ‘*spirit*’ is ruach, the Greek word for ‘*spirit*’ is pneuma—in both the Hebrew and Greek these words can mean ‘*spirit*’ but they can also be translated—‘breath.’

The *breath* of God equals the “*life of God*”. (Gen.2:7)—this church needed an *infusion* of the life of the Spirit.

Warren Wiersbe—

*“All of the church’s man-made programs can never bring life, any more than a circus can resurrect a corpse. The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and its life comes from the Spirit.”*

A.W. Towzer—

*“If you took the H.S. out of the early church 90% of what they were doing would have come to a halt. If you take the H.S. out of the work of the church today 10% would come to a stop.”*

The church of Jesus Christ in America has moved away from the power of the Holy Spirit to build God’s Church and has moved more towards man and a reliance on man to do the work of God.

There is a church in the area that borrowed (they didn’t have it in their bank account) \$150,000 to pay a secular consulting company to tell them how to make their church grow.

You say, *“What did they tell them for that much money?”*

Well, basically the advice was that they were to make the church so hip, relevant, positive, non-confrontational and seeker-friendly that the world would feel right at home.

The church at Sardis had become so much *like* the world that they could no longer *confront* the world!

The Church’s power has always been in its ‘*differentness*’ from the world.

That’s what spiritual deadness is all about—it’s where a church becomes so much like the world trying to reach the world that it gets flooded with worldly people who feel right at home until they take that church over and push all the spiritual life out.

When that happens, the church has to use man-made gimmicks and programs to try to build the church—because the power of the Holy Spirit is no longer there.

And only the power of the Holy Spirit can *breathe* life into a church and build a church by taking those dead in trespasses and sins and making them alive in Christ—

**Acts 2:47 (NKJV)**

<sup>47</sup> ...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Towzer—

*“It is scarcely possible, in most places, to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God’s professed children are bored with Him, for they must be wooed to meetings with the stick of stripped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments.”*

**Revelation 3:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> **“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars...**

Jesus also controls “**the seven stars**”, the messengers of the churches (Rev. 1:20), referring most likely to the pastors.

Sometimes it is a pastor’s fault that a church is dying—many pastors no longer have confidence in power of the Holy Spirit working through the teaching of the Word to reach people and build the church.

This was typified in what one leader of one of the largest denominations in the country had to say in addressing 40,000 delegates at a national convention.

He said that part of their purpose for gathering was to “*devise business methods by which the Holy Spirit of God could be regulated and made efficient.*”

I have a problem believing that a saved man filled with the Holy Spirit could have made such a statement—in my mind that man was a worldly, unsaved man masquerading as a saved, spiritual man.

To me, it was just another example of—“*the blind leading the blind*” as we see in so many last day’s churches.



Now at this point in the letters, Jesus usually offers a ‘**commendation**’ praising each church for whatever good was going on in their church.

But in this letter, we find no such commendation—and instead, we see the Lord Jesus move right into the **condemnation**.

## **The Condemnation**

### **Revelation 3:1-2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> ..."I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.**

As harsh as the letter to Thyatira was at least Jesus had a few good things to say about them—but here there is a big ‘blank spot’ where there should a *commendation* because He has nothing good to say about the church of Sardis—but simply starts condemning them for what was wrong with their church.

Jesus rebuke of this church is 3-fold:

### **1. They were placing all their worth on their reputation.**

**"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**

The word ‘**name**’ in the Greek could be translated ‘*reputation*’.

The Protestant Reformation was a dynamic time where brave men took a stand for truth and many paid the ultimate price for their faith.

But soon Protestantism became an empty shell—a dead movement.

O yes, there were certainly many men and women in Protestantism who loved the Lord and were born of and filled with the Holy Spirit, but as a movement much of the Protestant Church was dead—and if you doubt that all you have to do is look at Europe.

In Europe, the Protestant church is so dead that every year hundreds of Christian churches close and are sold to Muslims to be turned into Mosques.

**Revelation 3:1 (c)**

**...I know your works, that you have a name...**

The word translated “**name**” is *onoma* in the Greek—as I just said, the word could be translated *reputation*, but it’s also the Greek word we get the word “denomination” from.

Let me just stop and say—what a grand tradition those denominational churches have that can trace their beginnings back to the Protestant Reformation.

And the people in those denominations are very proud of their name and they talk constantly of the past glory of their heritage.

Jesus is saying to them, *“I know your works—I know those things that defined you, your history, your accomplishments that gave you that name in the first place—but you’re living in the past!”*

There are a lot of churches that are living in the past—they’re stuck in the 16<sup>th</sup> century—they’re still singing songs from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

*“Is that wrong?”* No, but what is God doing in your church or denomination today?

The Bible says to *“sing to God a new song”*—not constantly an old and worn out hymn!

Look, I love some of the old hymns they, I think they’re awesome—but don’t you think God wants to do a new thing?

In every generation where the Holy Spirit is moving there is new life and that life gives birth to new songs of praise.

- Talk about the new choruses that came out of the Jesus Movement of the 60's and 70's and how the old denominational churches used to condemn them.

How easy it is to rest on your laurels and point with pride to men like Luther and say, "*We are Lutherans*" or to Calvin and say, "*We are Calvinists*"; or to Wesley and say, "*We are Methodists*".

**"I know your works, that you have a name that you [think you're] alive—but you are dead." (v.1)**

Today most traditional mainline Protestant churches like Lutherans, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Methodists, and Congregationalists are championing everything from homosexuality to abortion rights to environmental issues and yet they no longer believe in the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the power of the Holy Spirit or that Jesus is really the only way to heaven.

They have a name and from the outside, seem alive (some are even expanding their existing buildings—not because they need more space to accommodate all the new people coming but because they have adopted a '*if you build it they will come*' mentality).

People still come for Sunday morning service (although attendance is way down for some of these churches).

However, there are not many at the midweek service (many no longer have a midweek service).

Prayer meetings are non-existent and there is no life in the Spirit.

Years ago, Cyndi was asked to speak at one of these denominational churches in the area at a women's luncheon...(finish).

They are churches in name only—"*You have a name (reputation) but are dead.*"

A sure sign of death is when a church worships its past—“*No new move of the Spirit for us, we’ve always done it this way...*”

They are content to live in the past and remember the “*good old days*” but aren’t looking for God to do great things in and through them today.

Sardis was a church that was proud of its reputation and past glory but was lacking in life and the power of the Holy Spirit for the present—which they seemed to have been okay with.

A lot of Christians are drawn to churches because of their name or history instead of what the Holy Spirit is doing in and through them in the present.

So first of all, Jesus condemns this church for “**placing all their worth on their reputation.**”

The second thing Jesus rebuked/condemned them for was—

## **2. Even the things that were left were about to die.**

**Revelation 3:2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...**

It is tragic that the very issues that the Reformation was built upon—Sola Scriptura [Scripture alone]; Sola Fide [faith alone]; Sola Gratia [grace alone], etc.—these incredible ‘pillars’ the Reformation was built upon are dying in the protestant denominations today—some have already died and are gone.

In fact in 1994 something very significant happened, so important that Dave Hunt called it “*the most significant event in church history in the last 500 years*” and caused him to write his book, “A Woman Rides the Beast.”

What was it?—It was when Protestants and Catholics came together and signed ‘ECT’ (“Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”)

This document states in part that—*“the Reformation went too far, that evangelicals and Protestants need to stop evangelizing Roman Catholics because they’re already our brothers and sisters in Christ, they’re already saved. And we need to realize that and celebrate that we are all one big family in Christ.”*

Folks, I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and I wasn’t saved—and for that matter, none of the Catholics I knew back then, whether family or Catholic friends were saved either.

And I think I’m on solid ground when I say many of you who grew up in the RCC weren’t saved—and thank God He sent someone to us who shared the gospel with us!

This is nothing more than *ecumenism* (‘a coming together in unity’) which the devil is using to prepare the last days, apostate Christian church to become part of the world church under the Antichrist and False Prophet. (Comment)

Protestants weren’t supposed to be evangelizing Roman Catholics after ECT—but the Catholic Church has stepped up its ‘evangelization’ of Protestants calling it, “Evangelization 2000”.

As they try to bring all of the “*separated brethren*” back to the Mother Church with their “*Come Home*” commercials targeting Protestants.

Again, ECT says that the Reformation went too far—but that is exactly the third thing that Jesus rebukes and condemns this church for—

### **3. Their works were incomplete**

**Revelation 3:2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.**

The word ‘**perfect**’ is a Greek word that means *complete*—but here Jesus says, “**I have not found your works perfect (complete) before God.**”

Or in other words, Jesus is telling this church that their works have not gone far enough!

The Protestant Reformation was needed but it wasn’t complete—it didn’t go far enough in purging the Protestant church from all the paganism rooted in the Roman Catholic Church.

For example—it brought with it many of the pagan Babylonian practices that had infected the RCC → Christmas, Easter, Lent etc. (Comment)

Jesus said to this church (Protestantism)—“**I know your works, but they’re incomplete, they didn’t go far enough...**”

Next week, we’ll pick it up with verse 3 and Jesus’ correction to the Church of Sardis.