

THE CHURCH OF SARDIS—REVELAION 3:1-6 (THE REFORMED CHURCH 1517-1790)

As we address this church, I feel it important to make you aware of a sobering scripture found in **Proverbs 21:16—*The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.*** There is nothing so heartbreaking as a dead church. Sad to say, multiplied thousands of thirsty souls have wandered in the desert of life and stumbled on the illusion of an oasis (the church) only to find a dust bowl of death.

Sardis was the capitol city of Lydia and was very prominent in Asia Minor. It was a _____ and an extremely wealthy city.

- It was the capitol of the ancient Lydian Kingdom
- According to prominent ancient Greek historians Sardis was founded by the sons of Hercules and it was most fabulous of all cities in its time.
- It had a world-famous king, King Croesus - he was the wealthiest king in the world in his time.
- The wealth came from the _____ river – The legend says that King Midas (to the east) wanted to be rich and asked the gods to bless with a touch. Supposedly the gods granted his request and everything he touched turned to gold (**The _____ Touch**). In his excitement everything he touched turned to gold...then one day he inadvertently touched his daughter and she also turned to gold. The blessing turned out to be a curse, so he begged the gods to take away the blessing. The gods told him to go wash in the river – as he did the curse was lifted and the gold began to flow downstream until it all settled on the banks of **SARDIS**. There was so much gold there that the King started minting gold coins (the first time ever in history).
- With its wealth it became degenerate, fell into moral decay and it filled with moral filth:
 - Historical writers describe the men as being _____
 - They dressed like women and even behaved like women
 - When Greek writers through history referred to homosexuality, they would often refer to the city of Sardis.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Although this church seems to have had a good name in many areas, it was _____.

- **DEAD** - Nekros (GR) = A body with no life, a lifeless cadaver
- They looked like and sounded like a Church, but the life of the Holy Spirit was not in them.

A light year is the distance light goes in a year, moving at 186,000 miles a second; that's a light year. I was reading about one particular star that astronomers estimate is 33 years away from earth. It would take 33 years for that light to reach earth. This particular article went on to say that that star could have been plunged into darkness 25 years ago. It could have died. But light would still be pouring down to earth. It would be shining in the sky as brightly as if the star was still alive.

This church is dead, and the emphasis there is speaking about spiritual death. Matthew 21:19, our Lord's sort of depiction of Israel – leaves, but no fruit. This is the church, the first church of the tares you might say: "You are dead." You could say that the congregation in Sardis was the very reverse of the congregation in Smyrna. Smyrna was being put to death and yet lived. Sardis appeared to be alive; it was dead. **A dead church, living a _____.**

You can tell a dead church. It's concerned with tradition. It's concerned with form. It's concerned with liturgy. It's concerned with welfare. It's concerned with social ills. It's concerned with tolerance of sin. It's preoccupied with systems. It's concerned with material things, not spiritual things. It doesn't proclaim the gospel. It doesn't uphold the Scripture. It doesn't pursue holiness.

What kills a church? Sin kills a church. Error kills the church. Compromise kills the church, and it's sin in the members, sin in the leaders: sins of commission, sins of omission. Little by little, sin kills. It kills the will because it becomes a habit. It kills the feelings because the heart becomes hardened. It kills the character because we become warped and twisted.

Sardis went through the motions: "I know your deeds, your deeds." **They were sufficient to give them a name among men.** Maybe they helped with some of the social ills in Sardis; maybe they did some philanthropic things there. Maybe they provided some service to the community. But whatever they did, **"Their deeds were not sufficient in the sight of My God."** That's what our Lord says. It's not enough. The church is a living lie. Really, there wasn't any reason to persecute the church, that's why there's no persecution, at least at this point.

Churches are dying all over everywhere. There are dead people in the pews; there are dead people in the pulpits. Church may be socially distinguished, may have all of its programming, but it's a spiritual graveyard, and its works are grave clothes: a poor disguise for an ecclesiastical corpse.

It reminds me of Samson: the charming, lovable hero of Israel in the dark days of their history, in the days of the judges, when Samson showed up to be the greatest champion ever: so many feats and exploits of heroic strength and courage. But something happened... Samson fell into sin, lost touch with the source of his strength. His hair only symbolized the spiritual fact that God was his strength; and when he disobeyed God, he lost that strength. When confronted with danger, he tried to react, and the Bible records this: "He didn't know that the Lord had departed from him."

Sardis means escaping ones or those who come out. This name, along with what the scripture teaches about this church, is a perfect picture of the Reformation Period. The Reformation was the result of continued emphasis by the Church of Rome on pagan doctrines rather than scripture. All of us are aware of one of the great fathers of the church, Martin Luther. Because the Roman church emphasized salvation by works, the cry went out from Luther, "The righteous will live by faith."

Although the Reformation was good for the church, it also had tragedy attached to it.

1. Luther sought the approval of political leaders and thus founded a state church. Unfortunately, the danger of this is that anyone who is part of the state is also part of the church. There is, therefore, no need for the personal acceptance of Christ and relationship with Him.
2. The Reformation brought an awareness of the need for separation between paganism and Christianity. The church, as a whole, did not change many customs or rituals of pagan origin (infant baptism, sprinkling, some elements of sacraments, etc.)

The main purpose of a church is the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This should be done in song and word. If people leave a church with the mysterious feeling of “worship” but have not been brought face-to-face with Jesus Christ in a personal way, they have been worshiping a dead church. — Tim LaHaye

A. Commendation:

- i. ***I know your deeds***—Some believe this to refer to the early stages of the Reformation when Luther and others defied Roman authority even at the risk of their lives.
- ii. ***You have a _____***—The Reformation church had a reputation as a church that was faithful to Christ.
- iii. ***Of Being Alive***—There was some life in this church, especially in the beginning.

B. Condemnation:

- i. ***You are dead***—The Reformation leaders began well; but, they still did not complete the task of separating the pagan rituals from Christianity. Jesus condemns the fact that they did not “perfect” their works.

C. Counsel:

- i. Five-Fold Counsel
 - 1) Wake up
 - 2) Strengthen what remains – I believe this to refer to the good doctrinal teachings of this period
 - 3) Remember what you received and heard
 - 4) Obey it
 - 5) Repent
- ii. The Warning of Christ—Christ warns them that if they don’t wake up and repent, _____!

D. Challenge:

- i. “Some have not” – There is a remnant in every church, even dead ones
- ii. The Overcomer’s Blessing – The word “overcoming” describes one that is constantly overcoming.
- iii. “I will not blot out thy name...” - It is possible to have one’s name blotted out of the Book of Life.

- 1) For sinning against God (Exodus 32:33)
- 2) For not being an overcomer (Rev. 3:5)
- 3) For taking away from the words of the prophecy of Revelation (Rev. 22:19)

THE CHURCH SHOULD REMEMBER THAT CHRIST IS KEEPING AN ACCOUNT OF OUR DEEDS DONE HERE ON EARTH. WHAT A SAD DAY IT WOULD BE IN JUDGMENT TO STAND BEFORE GOD AND HEAR HIM SAY, "I HAVE NOT FOUND YOUR WORKS PERFECT...." EVEN THOUGH WORKS WILL NOT SAVE US, IT SHOULD BE THE CHRISTIAN'S GOAL TO PLEASE HIS MASTER IN EVERY ENDEAVOR. "WHATEVER YOUR HAND FINDS TO DO, DO IT WITH ALL OF YOUR MIGHT."