



“8 Great Truths: Snapshots From Jesus in The Book of Revelation”



Teacher's Guide

The Church @ Sardis - Stop Wearing A Fatal Façade Week 6 – July 11, 2010

Opening Announcements and Prayer

Icebreaker: What does the term, “dead man walking” mean? How could that term be appropriately used for a marriage? How could it be used for a church?

Transition: The church at Sardis was a “dead man walking” and yet they were not aware of it. Let's see what we can learn from the letter to this church so we don't fall into that trap.

Read Revelation Chapter 3:1-6

- **City Tour** - Using information from Craig Koester's web tour to provide the following information:
<http://www2.luthersem.edu/ckoester/Revelation/main.htm>
 - Culture and Government
 - 30Mi SE of Thyatira
 - Was the first capital of the lydian empire 600BC of whom Croesus was the last king
 - Center for several successive empires: Persian, Pergamine, Seleucid, and Roman
 - Gold from the nearby river made Sardis Exceptionally wealthy and prosperous until the Second Century AD this is where the phrase "rich as Croesus" comes from
 - Sat at the crossroads of the East/West and North/South trade routes
 - Also willed to Rome by Attalus III
 - It had an impregnable fortress atop the mountain above the city, but fell to Cyrus the Great in 547BC and to Antiochus III in 218BC, both times because the Sardinians were so overconfident in their mountaintop fortress they failed to post sentries while they slept at night. Both Cyrus and Antiochus III sent small climbing parties in at night to unlock the gates from within and allow their forces in. These events play into the way Jesus composes the letter as we will see.
 - Commerce and industry
 - Wealthy center of gold panning
 - Trading center on the trade route crossroads
 - Sardis is also a big player in the textile and garment industry
 - Religious practices
 - Temple of Artemis - 2nd only to the Ephesian temple measured 300'Lx160'Wx58'H
 - Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus
 - Demeter, goddess of grain
- Questions for discussion:**
 - If you lived here what would be your greatest temptations?
 - How is this city like or unlike Colorado Springs?
- **The Letter**
 - 3:1a - Picture the author
 - The holder of the seven spirits (or sevenfold spirit) of God
 - This image is drawn from Rev 1:4 and Is. 11:2



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- This image could represent the sevenfold Spirit of God, i.e. the Holy Spirit
- The holder of the seven stars
- Again drawn from chapter one
- Being that he is seen here as the **holder** of the seven stars, it is appropriate to think of this as Jesus saying, I have the seven churches in my hand, expressing possession, and authority both.
- Recall that those in the church are those in relationship who have given themselves to Christ. We are his people, his holy possession.
- As the head of the church he has the dominion over them. Sufficient to remove the Ephesian lamp stand, in effect to make them cease to be a church. Sufficient to spiritually kill Jezebel and her children.
- 3:1b- Archival image of a Faded church – What the church looks like
 - Reputation for life, yet dead
 - Jesus has nothing good to say about Sardis.
 - Apparently, they were beautiful on the outside, going through the motions, much as the Pharisees did, giving the appearance of holiness, but were dead spiritually on the inside.
 - It appears that the community saw them
 - We must be prepared to suffer for Christ, taking up our cross daily.
- 3:2 – Warnings to a Faded Church
 - Wake up! Or I will come like a thief...
 - Without question Jesus is reiterating his statements in the gospels about his coming.
 - This kind of talk would have been especially poignant in Sardis as their city had fallen, not once, but twice while they were asleep and thought themselves secure.
 - The destruction will be swift and unexpected
 - Strengthen what remains and is about to die
 - There is a faint glimmer of hope in this statement which is undergirded later in the letter. Apparently there is something remaining of what the church started out to be.
 - They at the very least know what they should be doing if they are presenting the façade of doing it, so they have potential to return to true relationship with Jesus.
 - I have not found your deeds complete
 - This implies they did their deeds of godliness for all the wrong motives
 - They sought the praise of men not the praise of God
 - The “eyes of my God” are the only eyes that seen beyond the exterior to the heart of man.
 - They are the church with a fatal façade.
 - Questions for discussion:**
 - Why might the Sardinian church see Jesus’ judgment as a surprise?
 - What do you think Jesus meant when he talked about “What is about to die”?
 - What would it mean today for a church to have the reputation of being alive, but actually be dead?
 - Do you see this problem in your own life or that of other Christians?

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- 3:3 – 4 – A call to recapture the image of the true church
 - remember therefore what you have received and heard
 - They'd heard, i.e. the Spirit had enabled them to have ears to hear the Word of God in the past
 - They'd received, they had a past experience of coming alive in Christ
 - Obey and Repent
 - Respond to what you have received and heard
 - There are a few that have not soiled (or defiled) their clothes
 - These are the ones that have maintained their relationship with Jesus, be they few in number.
 - Consider the similarity to the 144k that have not defiled themselves with women in CH 14.
 - This is not a reference to celibacy
 - The 144k cannot be Jewish priests, as they were required to be married
 - Christian celibacy didn't begin as a practice until the 4th Century
 - This is again not talking about sexual immorality in the physical sense its roots are in previously used of spiritual adultery as in Ch 17 with the Harlot (Rome) who is the mother of harlots (Rome gave way to future empire that represent the Fallen Babylon life
 - These are those who are not succumbing to the damaging, deceptive, and destructive mode of the Fallen Babylon life of hollowness that the rest of this church fell prey to.
 - These few walk in white robes
 - One's garment displayed for all to see where you fit in Roman society. Additionally, the references to garments weren't lost on a city that was big in the textile industry as an indicator that Jesus really knew all about them.
 - The garment was an outer manifestation of the inner reality.
 - When we walk with Christ our inner life of Christlikeness manifests itself on the outside by how we live. It's our Worldview and the transformation that Jesus brings (Rom. 12) that drives how we act.

Questions for discussion:

- How might we "soil our garments" in today's world?
 - What does it mean to walk with Jesus?
 - What happens if they don't repent and obey?
- 3:5 - 6 - Picture the future - "To him who is conquering..."
 - Will, like the few, be clothed in White
 - Those who repent and obey will be able to attain the same purity and restored relationship of those who never strayed
 - Jesus can bring transformation although they have strayed greatly
 - Never blot out his name from the Book of Life
 - Our assurance of salvation comes not only from making the decision to accept God's grace in Jesus, but from our ongoing relationship with him.



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- The opposite image is that your name grows dimmer, fades, becomes less recognizable until it is completely obliterated. This would indicate, again that there is no idea of "Once saved, always saved" in Scripture.
 - I will acknowledge him before my father and his angels
 - Jesus recognizes those in relationship with him, those conquering Fallen Babylon.
 - Jesus represents us to the Father as his own. It's as if come Judgment Day our reputation has preceded us and we are recognized for whose we are when we arrive there.
- ***Summary discussion***
 - What might it look like for a church or Christians to move from Sardinian façade into sharp focus on walking with Jesus?
 - If we fail to maintain our relationship with Jesus, what will God do?
 - Do you see any evidence of a Sardis problem at Pikes Peak?
- **Peering Deeper**
 - How do the statements of 1 John 2:1, Luke 12:8, Matthew 10:32 and Job 16:19 reflect Jesus' statement about acknowledging his people? Are there other passages that support this? What might he say about you?
 - Is a person or a church ever irrecoverable, i.e. does God ever give up on them?
 - How can a Christian maintain his relationship to God while avoiding the façade mentality? What are the keys to authenticity in life and faith?