



The Church at Sardis – The Church of the Living Dead

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; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou lovest, and art dead.² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Rev 3:1-6)

This is the most somber message thus far to the churches – to appear living and, yet, to be dead! The name, SARDIS, means “those who escaped, or came out.” The actual fate of Sardis is dismal. It today lies in ashes and bears no resemblance to its former elegance and spiritual foundation in Christ. There is some archaeological evidence to suggest that the Church was founded by John as advocated by the Lutheran minister, Joseph A. Seiss. In the mid-second century, its minister was Melito who may have borne authority there at the time of John’s writing of Revelation.

The city was the lavish capital of Lydia once under the wealthy ruler, Croesus, and was located about thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. A more contemporary application of the nature of the Church at Sardis might be, in a very small way, the Reformation Church of Luther, Cranmer, and Calvin since these obeyed the command “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,

saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor 6:17-18) You may object that the faithful men who came out of the Papal monstrosity of Rome were not dead. This is true, but like the Church at Sardis, all were not dead at the time of the Reformation. Those who were given the Light of the Holy Ghost did, indeed, come out from among them. So, Sardis was like unto the Roman Church with her false traditions and manmade worship.

The Lord Jesus Christ is One with the Holy Ghost as He is One with the Father. The Seven Spirits represents the fullness and perfection of the Holy Spirit. *"These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars."* Our Lord bears the fullness of the Holy Ghost, though separate from it, as well as possession of the reins of the full Church represented in the Seven.

Remember how our Lord commended the Church at Smyrna? *"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)"* (Rev 2:9) But the opposite might be said of Sardis which was rich: *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."* This Church had the name 'Christian' but that was not a full and applicable name, for many were not Christian at all – they were what the modern media might call CINO's, or Christians in Name Only!" All who bear in Spirit and in Truth the name of Christ are forever alive. But many in Sardis were dead. They were spiritual zombies (walking dead) as are all of the lost. *"1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."* (Eph 2:) Yes, ever before we were chosen in Christ, we were dead men walking in sin. *"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* (Eph 2:5-6) It is a terrible verdict the Lord delivers to Sardis. Many churches will be so-judged of our modern day as well.

Is the Church at Sardis, after being so severely reprimanded, without hope? No, the Lord offers a balm of solace to those who remain and are faithful: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God."* The Church is comparable to a ship at sea that plies the waters with goods and merchandise of value. It is made for sea crossings. But when the seas (the world) gets into the ship, the ship's fate is in doubt. What action can the crew take? They must strengthen the hull where the leak is detected and repair the breach – or sink. The Church at Sardis was a sick man walking. The modern church is becoming very much like the Church at Sardis. We must be watchful and repair those things that remain and strengthen them. Perfection would never come to mind in describing the churches of the 'entertainment class' that we have allowed to take over our youth and even the elderly in churches of our day.

The word, REMEMBER, is a beautiful term. We tend to remember those things that are beautiful and pleasant, and to repress those things which are not so pleasant. We forget the many sins that we commit in a week, don't we. There is no way we can remember every one of them to confess before the Lord. But remembrance of the promises and beauties of God's Word is of paramount importance. While forgetfulness is involuntary, remembrance is an intentional effort to recall. *"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." If you visit Sardis today, you will find only the ruins and ashes of what was once a seemingly thriving church there. The ruins and ashes are evidence that the Lord did come as a thief to the destruction of that Church. I believe many faithful souls departed from that Church before its destiny was fulfilled in prophecy. *"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."* Those who were the faithful of Sardis had not fallen into the apostasies and sins of the larger church. It is, sadly, true today that only a few out of so many who occupy the pulpits each Sunday are alive and will see the glorious sunrise of the salvation that escaped the Church at Sardis.

What made those few of Sardis who escaped the condemnation worthy? It was not their good works, or professional achievements, but it was, rather, the Blood of Christ to which they held faithful as the called and chosen elect of God that made them to be considered worthy by God. It was not their worthiness, but that imputed worthiness of our Lord to which they could lay claim as their own.

"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." That White Robe of Righteousness purchased on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary is our raiment to cover the filthy rags of our own sins – just as the robe of the old father covered the filth of the pig sty of the returning Prodigal. *"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."* I wonder how many of us truly know if our names are written in the Book of Life. We should know with perfect assurance for that state of the elect of God is made known to them from the moment of their election. That name was entered in the Book of Life before the Foundation of the World: We read, of those who follow manmade religion: *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* (Rev 13:8) When was that name entered there? *". . . . and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world"* (Rev 17:8)

The Church at Sardis was, and IS, DEAD! How sad is that pronouncement. It describes so many churches (most) of our day. *"7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* (Matt 15:7-9) Too many self-pious of our church sit in the pulpits every Sunday, hear the sermon (hopefully a biblical one) and leave the Church in the same state in which they entered. They lock the church doors, bid their farewell to the minister, to their friends, and to our Lord (whom they leave at the Church until the next Sunday), and go about leading a life that is indiscernibly different from the common lot of modern society. Perhaps we should take stock of ourselves in this world of growing peril. Who are we truly in our heart of hearts? Are

we committed to Christ in our daily lives of service and learning; or are we as those to whom the Lord made reference as 'hypocrites?' *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."* (1 Cor 11:31) It just may be time the optimum time to seek a spiritual home elsewhere from Sardis for the benefit of our eternal souls.