

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#8: “Chapter Three”

INTRO:

We covered chapter two last time – the letters to the churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Today, we consider the letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. I remind you these are all cities in the Roman province of Asia. Why these particular churches were chosen we don't know; we can only speculate that they were good representations of what the church would be like during the duration of the church age.

So, let's begin today with Christ's letter to...

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS (1-6).

This city was known as Sardis the Impregnable, at least in the minds of the inhabitants. It was situated on a hill that was almost inaccessible, but in spite of that, it was captured not once but twice, and because the hill it was built upon was fairly small, its growth was hindered, so a shadow city grew up nearby. However, by the time John received the revelation, the city had become like a West Texas oil town after the boom of the 1940s and 1950s. It was a dying town.

The Sardis church had been strong in the day, but now it was all but dead spiritually. Christ's words to them are very plain: ***“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*** Have you ever known such a church? The church in America has been such at times. There's plenty of form, pomp, and circumstance, but no real worship. There's plenty of ceremony and tradition, but no real faith, hope, and love.

It's like the folks who were touring a great cathedral, with the tour guide describing all the gold used in it and how long it took to build it, when someone asked, “Has anyone been saved here lately?”

I'm reminded of all the cathedrals of Europe: magnificent structures and very impressive, but mostly empty, even on Sundays.

Such was Sardis.

Next, we have Christ's letter to...

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA (7-13).

The name of the city is taken from the Greek, PHILEO, which means “brotherly love.” It was founded by Attalus II in the second century B.C. and got its name because

of the love Attalus had for his brother, Fumenes, to be an educational center to spread the Greek language and culture.

Christ says to this church: ***“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you as open door, which no one is able to shut.”*** Where does that ***“open door”*** lead to? It’s probably to the world where the gospel could be preached. The Philadelphia church was a church interested in missions – evangelism around the world.

Hendriksen says that *“Philadelphia’s church, though of small account in human eyes, was great in God’s eyes”* (p.92). Could this also be descriptive of Village Christian Church?

Again, Christ says to this little church: ***“I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. . . Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world...”*** I’d like to hear such words about Village Christian. Wouldn’t you?

To the faithful in the Philadelphia church, Christ promises four things:

1. They will be victorious over the Jews that are against them;
2. They will be kept safe from ***“the hour of trial that is coming”***;
3. They will be made pillars in the temple of God; and
4. Christ will write God’s name, the name of the city of God, Jerusalem, and His own new name on them. In other words, they will clearly belong to God forever and ever.

Finally, we come to Christ’s letter to...

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA (14-22).

Laodicea was located in a “hot springs” area of the province. Isn’t that interesting? It was also known for being a city of wealthy people. Hendriksen comments: *“It was the home of millionaires. . . So wealthy was this city that its inhabitants declined to receive aid from the government after the place had been partly wrecked by an earthquake”* (pp. 93-94).

The attitude that sprang from their wealth spilled over into the church. Why is it that the poorer we are, the more easily we humbly present ourselves to God as sinners needing mercy? The wealthy rarely do this. The Christians at Laodicea were smugly ***“lukewarm”*** in the eyes of the Lord. When they were told, ***“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth”*** (vv. 15-16), they of the area of hot springs knew just what that meant. It meant that they were disgusting – not just disgusting, but VERY disgusting.

But Jesus isn't giving up on them. He doesn't condemn them; He *counsels* them to do three things:

1. He tells them to buy gold from Him – heavenly gold – that they may truly be rich – rich spiritually, not just rich in earthly gold;
2. Then, He counsels them to clothe themselves in the white garments of holiness, not just in fine worldly clothes;
3. Finally, He counsels them to anoint their eyes with salve spiritually so that they might see themselves as God sees them.

An interesting thing about Jesus' counsel here is that these rich people from the area of hot springs lived in a city with a medical school that was known for its research in eye problems and an area where black wool was produced that was used in fine clothing.

Then the Lord says to them through the angel and John words that we have been reminded of many times: ***“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent”*** (v. 19). God is a god of second chances.

The idea of Christ coming in to dine with anyone who will open the door to him comes from the traditional belief that dining with someone was the sign of special friendship or of a covenant relationship.

The believers at Laodicea, while once heaven-bound, had shut Christ out of their lives and out of their church. Unless they repented and opened the door to Him, they would miss out on the heavenly reward of the faithful. The state of the Laodiceans flies into the face of today's “once saved, always saved” doctrine.

IN CLOSING:

Each of these seven churches represent the condition of a congregation or the church in general or the churches in a given area:

- Ephesus was the example of good church that had not kept the main thing the main thing;
- Smyrna was a poor persecuted church of faithful believers;
- Pergamum was a congregation of believers who were concerned about their own salvation, but their concern for others was lacking;
- Thyatira was a congregation of faithful believers who didn't have the wherewithal to deal with a teacher of false doctrine;
- Sardis was a very active, very busy church that was just going through the motions; they were spiritually dead;
- Philadelphia was a really good church, small but faithfully teaching truth and presenting the gospel to the lost;
- Laodicea was the disgusting congregation of rich people who needed to repent.

Hendriksen comments:

“The sevenfold condition of these churches actually existed at that time. It exists today. It has existed during the entire intervening dispensation. It has become abundantly evident that the one great question is this: Are these churches faithful to their charge? Do they hold fast the name of the lord in the midst of the darkness of this world? In other words, are they lampstands, light-bearers?” (pp. 97-98).

Which church are we like? Which church would we **like** to be like?