

Checkin' Out My Walk  
#16 - SARDIS > A City of Failures & Power For Success

Many people go to God's house expecting to be filled and fed with the Living Water and The Bread of Life, only to find trappings and rituals, but no help or hope. Such was the condition of the church at Sardis which had taken on the character of the city in which she resided.

Rev. 3:1-4 Sardis '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.

<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. <sup>3</sup> Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

<sup>4</sup> You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

The message to Sardis lists no specific enemies, internal or external. The problem of the congregation in John's time was not with the Jews, the Roman Empire or false teaching. There is no name calling--no liars, no Balaam, Nicolaitans or Jezebel, no synagogue of Satan, no throne of Satan or depths of Satan. Yet no other message is more damaging or more urgent than this one. Walt Kelly announced a generation ago in his comic strip *Pogo*, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" Too often, when we encounter no spiritual adversaries, it is because *we* are the enemy.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, and the Lord is not deceived." The church needed to stir up the living Spirit of God in order to come to life.

George Eldon Ladd defined the Sardis church as "a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power."

Paul had described such Christians by saying they seemed quite religious but denied God's power in their lives (II Timothy 3:5). From such people, turn away.

The City of Sardis, founded about 1200 BC, 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, and capital city of Lydia, was on an important and busy trade route. Abundant archaeological remains include a temple to Artemis, a huge gymnasium and the largest synagogue yet found in the ancient world, suggesting a Jewish community numbering in the thousands (Finegan 1981:177-78).

#### A. Wealth of Sardis

Sardis was the ancient residence of the kings of Lydia. While Sardis, legendary for wealth, reached its zenith under King Croesus (King Midas with the "golden touch"), reputed to have

been the richest man in the world, it also fell under his reign. Cyrus the Great is said to have taken \$600,000,000 worth of treasure from the city when he captured it in 549 BC. The first coins minted were probably from ore panned from the Pactolus river, a gold-bearing river that ran right down their main street. As we shall see, King Midas and the people of the city, who were used to being rich, became complacent in their wealth, their power and their city's apparent invincibility.

### B. Strategic Location

Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. The original city sat on top of a 1,500' high plateau with one narrow road leading into the city. The other sides of the plateau were just steep cliffs almost impossible to scale.

Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice: first by Cyrus the Great in 549 BC and by Antiochus the Great in 218 BC.

Why? Its arrogance and overconfidence manifested in failing to keep an adequate watch.

Rev.3:2-3 Be watchful... Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

When Sardis came under attack by Cyrus the Persian, King Croesus and his people retreated to their city, put a detail at one place, and believed they were safe. One night, one of the Persian soldiers saw a Sardinian soldier drop his helmet over the wall of the city. He watched as that soldier followed a hidden path down the side of the mountain to retrieve his helmet. When nightfall came, Cyrus and his troops followed the hidden path up the side of the mountain, entered the city while the guards slept and conquered Sardis.

It was taken "like a thief in the night."

### C. Paganism of Sardis

Sardis had a complex of pagan religions which emphasized the healing power of their gods. These "gods" had the ability to restore life. Two miles outside of Sardis was a hot springs where they believed the gods manifested their life-giving power. The people of Sardis went out to the hot springs to get life. How ironic! The pagan religions celebrated the ability of their false gods to give life and the true church with the true God was dead.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele, a primal nature goddess worshipped with orgiastic rites. No temple worshiper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods.

Note the following account by Andrew Tate of the actual moral conditions of this idolatry. "Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysus were practiced at the festivals held in her honor. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions. When we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity,

with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex."

#### D. City Of Sardis in John's Time

In John's time it was a famous and wealthy city on the decline (a shell of what it had been), a center of pagan worship and the site of a great temple to the goddess Artemis. Sardis was dying because the people had grown lazy, degenerate, immoral, complacent and apathetic. The name Sardis became synonymous with promise without performance; appearance without reality; false confidence that heralded ruin. Sardis, proud of its reputation and its past, was apparently trying to ride on the reputation of the past. Suffering from neglect and indifference, its reputation was all it had left. For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived. They betrayed themselves by lack of watchfulness and diligence.

#### E. Church of Sardis in John's Time

Reputed to be alive, Sardis is in fact a dead church. Apparently, the church in Sardis had adopted the atmosphere of the city. The church had become a thermometer that registered the temperature of the city instead of a thermostat that changed the temperature of the city. Jesus comes to this lazy, apathetic, complacent church with no words of commendation. Apparently Sardis started out strong, doing good works, as noted in the letter of "having a name" and "strengthen the things that remain." Somehow they wavered or faltered and failed to persevere; lack of watchfulness and diligence.

A great Old Testament analogy is Samson, the charming hero of Israel in the dark, dark days of their history. He was the greatest champion of freedom and the strongest man that ever lived. His name is synonymous with strength and courage due to his many feats and exploits. Beguiled by Delilah who cut his hair, he lost his strength. The haircut symbolized his unwillingness to obey God. Due to disobedience, God took his strength away.

When he was confronted with danger and tried to meet it, he could not overcome.

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!"

But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

Consider: It was the same old Samson with the same living name that was synonymous with strength, but the power was gone. The result was Samson's defeat, imprisonment, blindness and death. That miserable wreck, that pitiful, blind giant tied with two brass chains stooping over a grinding mill in the prison of Gaza is depicted as one tragic figure.

That was Sardis, once strong, once virile, once alive, once a powerful church began to sow sin. They became weak, blind, dead and were bound in brass chains grinding the grain of sin's prison, not even knowing that God had long since departed.

Churches today? Business of activity, dressed up, organized, but the whole congregation is blind, weak and dead. "You have a name, you're the So-and-so church, but you're dead."

#### E. Church of Sardis in 1517-1793 AD

The resemblance between the church of Sardis and the churches which sprang from the Protestant Reformation is striking. They "have a name that they are alive, but they are dead". There seems to be no evidence, in an era of growing Roman persecution, the church at Sardis experienced persecution, corrupt theology or false teachers. It had a good reputation and a name it was alive, but the claim was a lie. There was no spiritual life in the church.

Why did both Jews and Romans leave this church untouched when they so vigorously persecuted their neighbors?

1. There wasn't a reason to persecute this church! They were already in Satan's domain.

The sinful, unregenerate, worldly, dead church is not attacked by the world.

The church became the world.

2. Another answer may be its lack of aggressive and positive Christianity.

Simply put, *Sardis was the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.*

3. The church had almost completely compromised with the pagan culture of the city. The result of this "ecumenical" approach was that the once busy, fruitful church was compromising itself almost to death. The death of Sardis isn't from a lack of youth activities, or 'spiritual awakening' programs.' Rather, it seems the church at Sardis lacked the depth of conviction, which is necessary to even begin a fight against heresy. Sardis was drowning in mediocrity while she pursued non-controversial "works." The church at Sardis had become "secularized." Its fundamental worldview had become the same as that of the surrounding pagan culture. No wonder Satan did not bother adding persecution and suffering!

I. Christ's Pronouncement - Rev. 3:1 - There is HOPE - I Am Able To Bring New Life

A. He Comes Proclaiming His Deity - Jesus comes to this church as One Who has the "seven Spirits of God" and as One Who is holding the "seven stars".

Rev. 1:4 ...from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

Consider: The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Its life comes only from the Spirit of God.

Problem: You have a name you are alive, but you are DEAD. Your lamp of faith is extinguished.

Reason: Currently, you are not experiencing what you actually possess because you have grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit, resulting in a loss of the power of the Holy Spirit to infuse Christ's life.

A dead church does not have the benefit of the living power of the Holy Spirit, nor does it have godly leaders who manifest the life and power of God.

Result: Sardis, dominated by the flesh, sin and unbelief, was devoid of the Spirit.

Example of: Carnal believers who make a good start, but fail to move on, grow up and learn to experience their position in Jesus Christ. They are active, engaged in "works," but temporally dead and out of fellowship with Christ.

Remedy: Jesus has the life-giving Spirit

The seven-fold ministry of the Spirit, defined in Isaiah 11:2, emphasizes the fullness and completeness of the Holy Spirit's ministry in His power and operation.

Spirit of the Lord	Member of the Trinity
Spirit of Wisdom	Intelligence or right use of knowledge
Spirit of Understanding	Insight, perception, able to discern
Spirit of Counsel	Prudence or ability to give good advice
Spirit of Might	Force, power, strength (spiritual warfare)
Spirit of Knowledge	Personally experience or know God
Spirit of the Fear of the Lord	Profound respect or awe for God

Jesus Christ as head of the church brought HOPE in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of His power to bring LIFE. He is ALL we need to succeed and triumph as Christians and as the church.

### Get Your Hands On Your Wealth

Eph. 3:14-21 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Paul's prayer emphasizes enablement > realize how vast your wealth is and by faith use it. Each of the 4 petitions leads into the next one. He prays our inner man might have spiritual strength which will lead to a deeper experience with Christ which will enable us to apprehend (get hold of) God's great love which will result in our being "filled unto all the fullness of God."

#### I. Strength:

1. The PRESENCE of the Holy Spirit in my life is evidence of my justification.
2. The Holy Spirit's POWER enables me to live and walk as a Christian.
  - a. Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
  - b. Luke 4:1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit – Jesus performed His earthly ministry in the power of the Spirit.

Truth: The Holy Spirit is MY ONLY RESOURCE to live the Christian life.

Note: There are 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Acts. He was crucial in the life of the early church.

"If God took the Holy Spirit out of this world, most of what we Christians are doing would go right on - and nobody would know the difference!"

3. His power is given to us "according to the riches of His glory." Jesus Christ returned to glory and sent the Spirit from heaven to indwell and EMPOWER His people.

a. It is not necessary for us to beg or "work something up." The power is sent down.

4. This power is for our "inner man," the spiritual part where God dwells and works.

a. Scripture tells us our inner man can see, hear, taste, feel, must be exercised, cleansed and fed. The inner man can be renewed spiritually in spite of outward physical decay day by day.

(II Cor. 4:16-18). It is this inner power that causes us to succeed.

5. The Holy Spirit empowers my inner man. My spiritual faculties are controlled by God.

a. When I yield to the Spirit and let Him control my inner man, I succeed in living to the glory of God.

b. I feed my inner man the Word of God, pray, worship God, confess and keep my vessel clean and loving obedience.

## II. Depth

1. Paul used 3 verbs to convey the idea of spiritual depth

a. Dwell - Settle down and feel at home - He yearned for Christ to settle down and feel at home in their hearts - not a surface, but an ever-deepening fellowship.

Illus: Abraham - God came down Himself, brought 2 angels with Him and visited Abraham's tent. They talked with him and ate a meal. They felt at home because he was a man of faith and obedience. Their other task was to investigate the sins of Sodom because God planned to destroy Sodom & Gomorrah. Lot, a believer, was living in Sodom. God wanted to warn him to get out before judgment fell. BUT the Lord Himself did not go to Sodom. He sent the 2 angels. He did not feel at home in Lot's house.

b. Rooted - Tree roots must go deep into the soil for nourishment and stability.

Jer. 17:5-8 "Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. <sup>6</sup> For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, *In* a salt land *which is* not inhabited.

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Truth: If there is to be power in my life, there must be depth and the roots must go deeper and deeper into the love of Christ.

c. Grounded, an architectural term, refers to the foundation. If you don't go deep, you can't go high. The trials of life test the depth of our experience. The storms that blow through reveal the strength of our roots.

Truth: We need a deeper experience with Christ to sustain us during the severe trials of life.

### III. Apprehend

1. Comprehend = mentally grasping something; Apprehend = laying hold of it for yourself

Consider: It is possible to understand something but not make it your own.

2. We need to lay hold of the vast expanses of the love of God.

Truth: I NEVER have to worry about having inadequate spiritual resources to meet the demands of life. Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

### IV. Fullness

1. Water will flow into an empty place because nature abhors a vacuum.

2. God wants me to experience His fullness.

3. The means of my fullness is the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

4. The measure of my fullness is God Himself. (Eph. 4:11-16) Consider: It is tragic when we use the wrong measurements in examining our own spiritual lives. We measure ourselves by a weaker Christian. Paul says the measure is Christ and we cannot boast about anything.

Truth: Positionally, I am complete in Him and all resources are there, but experientially, I enjoy only the grace I apprehend by faith.

Question: Have you been cut off from your source of power? Unbelief, unconfessed sin, not watching, worldly attitudes - these can ROB us of the POWER of the Holy Spirit.

Truth: A Christian robbed of power cannot be used of God.

John 15:5 Without Me, you can do nothing.

Prayer: Increase my desire to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit.