

The Churches of Christ Salute You

Lesson Twelve

(Romans 16:16)

August 31, 2008

LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

Overview:

1. Paul wrote to the Romans about the “churches of Christ.”
2. A plurality of churches did not mean a number of different denominations.
3. Instead, each was a local body of believers that belonged to Christ.
4. Since we also are a church of Christ, there are many lessons to be learned from these early churches.

Introduction:

1. Sardis was located about 35 miles southeast of Thyatira.
2. It was located at an intersection of several roads and, thus, became a wealthy city.
3. In AD 17, the city was destroyed by an earthquake.
4. Though rebuilt, Sardis never regained its former glory.
5. So, it was a city in decline – with an appearance of life, but in its final breaths.

I. Salutation

Revelation 3:1 a

- A. It is not known how, when or by whom this church was founded.
- B. Sardis is mentioned in Scripture only here and in Revelation 1:11.
- C. The Greek name Sardis is actually plural for there were two cities.
 1. One was built in the valley below Mount Tmolus.
 2. The other was built upon a plateau some 1,500 feet high, formed by a rocky spur that jutted out from the mountain.
 3. This plateau was surrounded on three sides by sheer cliffs that were nearly impossible to scale.
- D. Sardis was considered to be so well situated that it needed no human defense.
 1. In fact, twice in its history the city was captured by its enemies.
 2. The first was accomplished by Cyrus in 546 BC.
 - a. A Lydian soldier stationed at Sardis dropped his helmet down the side of one of the cliffs.
 - b. He made his way down the cliff by a path secret to the men of Sardis and retrieved his helmet.
 - c. Little did he know that the soldiers of Cyrus were watching his movements and thereby learned how to scale the cliffs and capture the city.
 3. The second was accomplished by Antiochus in 218 BC.
- E. Sardis was a city of great wealth.
 1. Gold was panned from the Pactolus River that flowed near the city.
 2. In fact, Croesus was said to have carried \$600,000,000 with him as he left the city after being defeated by Cyrus.
 3. It is reputed to be the first city to mint silver and gold coins.
- F. With great wealth came great luxury and immorality.
- G. Sardis was home to a large population of Jews.
- H. Sardis was known for its healing hot springs.
- I. The primary gods worshipped in Sardis were Cybele, Artemis, Zeus, Hades and Persephone.

II. Description of Jesus

Revelation 3:1 b

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- A. Jesus is called the One who has the “seven Spirits of God.”
 - 1. Seven is the number of perfection and completion.
 - 2. The phrase “seven Spirits” is a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit.
 - 3. The meaning is that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are in complete harmony with one another (cf. John 3:34).
 - 4. In the context, it is also a statement about the inspiration of the message to the churches.
- B. Jesus is called the One who has the “seven stars.”
 - 1. Again, seven is the number of perfection and completion.
 - 2. The seven stars are said to be in His right hand (1:16; 2:1).
 - 3. We are told that they are the angels (or messengers) to the seven churches (1:20).
 - 4. In other words, Jesus is delivering an inspired message by His chosen messengers to the seven churches of Asia.

III. Commendation

Revelation 3:4

- A. The only commendation for Sardis was that there were a few members of the church who were undefiled.
- B. In comparison with the world, the saved are always in the minority (cf. Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:23; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.).
- C. How sad it is to consider that even the church God has only a faithful few (cf. Matthew 9:37; 22:14; 1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4-5; etc.).
- D. In spite of the sinfulness in Sardis, there were still those faithful to God who practiced pure, undefiled religion (cf. James 1:27).
 - 1. They had not defiled their garments with sin (cf. Revelation 7:14; 19:8; Jude 1:23).
 - 2. Thus, they could walk with the Lord, dressed in pure, white clothing.
 - 3. Because of their faithfulness, the Lord had made them worthy (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5; etc.).

IV. Condemnation

Revelation 3:1-2

- A. Sardis was the church of the living dead.
- B. The town had a vibrant history and a reputation for luxury and wealth; but, at present, it was decaying and headed toward ruin.
- C. Likewise, the church had a name and a reputation of being alive and thriving.
- D. But, in truth, they were dead.
- E. Jesus sees what man may not and judges by what is and not by what is perceived.
- F. He knew the works of this congregation.
 - 1. He knew their past works, which seem to have been good.
 - 2. But, he also knew that they were resting on past works.
 - 3. Their present works were not perfect (complete) – they had become lazy, tired and complacent.
 - 4. A heritage of past faithfulness does not guarantee present approval.
 - 5. A busy congregation does not equal a faithful congregation – we must be engaged in the right works.
 - 6. The brethren in Sardis had not finished what they had started.
 - 7. “Church programs do not die – brethren die! And a congregation that is not on fire from above is in danger of fire from below!”
- G. He knew the reputation of this congregation.

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1. It is important for the church to have a good reputation in the community and among other congregations.
 2. However, just having a good name among men does not mean that one has a good name with God.
 3. Too many churches seek the approval of men rather than God.
 4. They practice an “inoffensive” Christianity that only offends Christ!
- H. He knew the needs of this congregation.
1. They needed to watch – to be on guard.
 - a. Twice, the city of Sardis had been conquered because her soldiers were asleep when they should have been watching.
 - b. Likewise, the church had gone to sleep and the enemy had taken over.
 - c. Jesus literally says, “Become awake and on the watch!”
 2. They needed to strengthen the things that had not yet died.
 - a. What things remained were in grave peril of perishing.
 - b. Thus, they needed to work to reestablish their good works.
 - c. The word “strengthen” means, “to make stable, to render constant, to make firm.”
 - d. They needed a revival, for their salt had lost its power!
 - e. Apathy is a sin that will destroy a congregation.
 3. They needed to recognize how near they were to death!
- I. The church at Sardis was its own worst enemy.
1. They had no false teachers like Balaam or the Nicolaitanes.
 2. They had no evil corruptor like Jezebel.
 3. They had simply become pew-sitters instead of go-getters.
- V. Warnings Revelation 3:3 b
- A. If they refused to wake up, be on guard and repent, Jesus would become their enemy and come upon them as a thief.
 - B. This had happened to the city twice – would it also happen to the church?
 - C. If it did happen, they would not even know when the Lord had cast them off and removed their candlestick.
- VI. Exhortations Revelation 3:3 a
- A. They were exhorted to remember – the Truth.
 - B. They were exhorted to react – to hold fast and to keep what they had.
 - C. They were exhorted to repent.
- VII. Blessings Revelation 3:5-6
- A. Those who overcome will be clothed in white.
 1. Again, white clothes are a symbol of purity and forgiveness.
 2. We must be clothed in white to be wed to the Lord (Matt. 22:11-12).
 - B. Those who overcome will not be blotted out of the book of life.
 1. To have one’s name written in the book means salvation (21:27).
 2. To have one’s name removed means condemnation (20:15).
 - C. Those who overcome will be confessed by the Lord before the Father (cf. Matthew 10:32-33).

Conclusion: The church at Sardis teaches many powerful lessons for us today.