

## *Sardis – Message to a church in decay*

**Intro:** Have you ever toured Europe? Many places are falling apart, in various states of decay. They are living off their history, because neither their present nor their future is looking all that good.

That was the case in Sardis. It had a temple and fortress that rose eight hundred feet above the city, set up against a mountain. It was very impressive and, nearly, impregnable. (it had fallen twice, once to Cyrus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC).

It was also known for its huge “city of the dead;” a Necropolis.

It was known for one more thing: it had been an extremely wealthy city that now lived on its memories of great times. It was slowly decaying and falling apart, but the people refused to acknowledge that they were no longer the Sardis of times past. It was a city of peace, but not the peace won in battle, rather “the peace of the man whose dreams are dead and whose mind is asleep, the peace of lethargy and evasion.” Herodotus said it was full of people who just wanted to play, sing, and shop.

### **I. The Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)**

- A.** The first thing they had to understand was that their reputation didn't match up to their reality. They were told that they were alive and vital, but there were serious problems.
  - 1.** Wake up! They needed to see what they had to work with; what remained...
  - 2.** And they needed to finish what they started.
  - 3.** Most churches don't need new programs as much as they need to finish the work they've started.
  - 4.** What is in your hands? Start with that... and don't stop until you finish! (volunteer fatigue, giving fatigue) If you can fog a mirror, it's time to work.
- B.** They were to remember what they'd been taught. That's a tough order! (“We need to teach more about the Holy Spirit!”) As long as “church” means these walls, we will remain ignorant about what we have been taught. We have to study in small groups, study in our homes, study **WITHOUT** stopping!
- C.** There is a warning here: Jesus says he will come without warning and remove them from his protection (the lampstand will be moved). God's patience is not forever. It might not be as long as you'd like or hope. (and it isn't the same for everybody)

- D.** Some in Sardis hadn't soiled their clothes yet. What does that mean?
- 1.** In Sardis, they had a major wool industry.
  - 2.** You were not allowed to move around the city with soiled clothes; and such were expressly forbidden near or in the temples.
  - 3.** Keep clean and God won't erase your name from the Book of Life (erasing IS possible).

## **II. The Spirit Gives Life**

- A.** Romans 8:9-15. God's spirit is the source of life – and Sardis needs life. When we, in the West, talk about the Spirit, we discuss doctrine. We talk about what rules the Spirit must work under(!).
- B.** In other places in the world, the spirit is discussed in terms of what He is doing. The spirit is alive, active, and present in all aspects of life.
- C.** One of these is hashing out doctrine. The other is a search for how to live in faith. As to which of these God would prefer, check out Isaiah's description of what kind of fasting God would prefer.
- 1.** Isaiah 58:2-10.
  - 2.** It isn't a matter of outside obedience; but of a passion, a faith that moves us beyond the mere actions of worship into a LIFE of worship.
  - 3.** A life where we spend ourselves!
- D.** Had Sardis descended into legalism, or countless new programs that only served themselves? Regardless, God wants our worship to MATTER. He wants us to change the way the world works because of our faith.

## **III. And you, Rochester**

- A.** As much as we love this congregation, and as much as we thrill to see it grow, we have somewhat against some of you.
- B.** Too many come for one service, ignore Bible classes, and get out, back into the world... and wonder why their children's faith is weak, or why they aren't full of joy and passion.
- C.** Too many gather together and make the Corinthian mistake. Paul – who loved and believed in fellowship – told them he would rather they didn't meet each other at all because, when

they did, they made a mockery of their Lord by their behavior. Too many believe that they can eat to excess, drink to excess, and drink very deeply from this world's entertainments and still be called Christian. Ask Sardis how easy it is to soil a white robe.

- D.** Then ask Jesus what happens to people who let this world, and their own behavior, soil that robe.
- E.** This is an admonition – a call to more holy living, more active faith, more barriers placed on your heart, mind, and behavior in honor of Jesus Christ.
- F.** It is a call to a true fast.
- G.** It is a call to action – to moving into active units that will help you build up your faith, not weaken, dilute it.