

Sardis : The Church That Couldn't Do Anything Right

- Located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira; on a major highway in modern-day Sart, Turkey
- Once the capital city of ancient Lydia
- Gold was discovered at the river that ran through Sardis, making it one of the most wealthiest cities in Asia Minor.
- Involved in extensive textile manufacturing, the dye industry, and jewelry making
- Sardis was built on a 1500 foot plateau surrounded by rugged cliffs. Sardis felt indestructible and was careless. In 547BC Cyrus the Persian captured the city by following a secret passageway up the cliff, arriving at an unguarded city. Antiochus the Greek invaded the city the same way 300 years later.
- When John was writing this letter, the city laid in ruins.

Characteristics:

1. Description of Jesus (3:1)

a. Jesus is “he that hath the seven spirits and the seven stars”?

- i. We have seen the seven stars represent either the pastors of each church or the angels assigned to each church (depending on your interpretation). But what are the seven spirits? Isn't there just ONE Holy Spirit?** Seven is used throughout the entire Bible to represent “completion”. This is probably a reference to Isaiah 11:2 where the Messiah is said to exhibit the Spirit’s “sevenfold characteristics.” (The Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord) Jesus encompasses ALL of the attributes of the Holy Spirit. You are gifted the Holy Spirit as a Christian, through your belief and surrender to Jesus Christ, and therefore you are gifted these same attributes at your disposal.
- ii. If you have trusted in Christ as your Saviour, do you possess the very same Holy Spirit that Jesus had?** Yes. As a Christian, you don't have just a tiny bit of the Holy Spirit, you have all the Holy Spirit. **The real question is “Does the Holy Spirit have all of you?”**
- iii. Discuss which of the characteristics above are your strongest and which ones could you work on.**

2. Praises (?)

- a. Wow. Jesus couldn't find a single, solitary good thing to say about the church at Sardis.**

3. Condemnations (3:2-6)

- a. Sardis was a church that piggybacked off of their church forefathers. Sardis was founded on strong Christian founders that had zeal and commitment to match. The church had a good reputation, solid history, and looked good from the outside, but Jesus said the church was currently DYING! Apparently, the church had many members that were not truly “born again” Christians. It looked alive, but was dead.**
- b. Why was Jesus concerned that they weren't “watching” for the coming of the Lord? Constantly watching for the coming of the Lord means you have your eyes set on**

heavenly things. **If you live each day looking and anticipating today could be the day the Lord returns, how could it shape your life?**

- c. **What happens to a church that trusts in the PAST GLORY of their church, instead of the PRESENT POWER OF GOD?** Many people get caught into the trap of thinking since they have “went to church their whole life”, or “come from a church family”, or “worked a lot in the church”, that this is the means of their salvation. They earned it. **Why is the idea of earning salvation through heritage, works, or anything else both ridiculous and impossible according to scripture?**
 - d. **Somebody once said that a church is in danger of dying when its memories of the past are greater than the hopes for its future. Is this truth and why?**
4. **Jesus gives four corrections the people of Sardis needed to make:**
- a. **WAKE UP: Why was Jesus concerned that they weren’t “watching” for the coming of the Lord?** If you truly lived each day looking and anticipating today could be the day the Lord returns, how could/should it shape your life? Constantly watching for the coming of the Lord means you have your eyes set on heavenly things. Your on guard against attacks from Satan, it protects us against temptations, it makes us aware of others that aren’t saved, it motivates us to ministry, it puts our lives in perspective and many other things.
 - b. **STRENGTHEN THE THINGS THAT REMAIN:** The church at Sardis was built on a strong foundation. The members were in a church rut. Jesus tells them to begin strengthening those weak areas because they are on the verge of completely dying. **Do you think there is such as a thing as just maintaining your relationship with God?** You are either moving towards or away from God at all times. Friendships and relationships do not thrive without commitment and work. They do not survive without spending time with one another. We see all these things in our lives today, so why would we think it is any different with God?
 - c. **REMEMBER WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED: What have they forgotten?**
 - d. **REPENT:** This does not mean just saying sorry. This means to have a change of mind that leads to a change of direction.

Philadelphia : The Church That Couldn't Do Anything Wrong

- Located 28 miles southeast of Sardis, in modern day Alasehir, Turkey.
- Philadelphia means “brotherly love” in Greek.
- Philadelpia was built on an edge of a plain that had been scorched by lava from a nearby volcano. The lava fields were great for growing grapes and eventually led to the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine. The plain had a lot of earthquakes that had destroyed the city a number of times.
- By the time John wrote this letter, most people lived outside the city in fear of falling debris from another earthquake.

Characteristics:

5. Description of Jesus (3:7)

- a. **“Holy”**: Do you agree with this statement? **“To say Jesus is holy is to say Jesus is God”**? There is no human, no person, no preacher, no Pope, not anyone that is truly “HOLY”. To be truly “HOLY” is to be without sin, perfectly wholesome and loving, perfectly following God’s will with every action and thought. Only God has this status, and since Jesus also contains this status, Jesus must be one with God. While we cannot fully understand and grasp the Trinity, we can marvel and celebrate it.
- b. **“True”**: The Greek word used here is not “alethes” which means the difference between truth and what is false. The Greek word used is “alethenos” which is the difference between what is real and unreal. Jesus is not make-believe or fantasy. He is absolutely real in contrast to all the false pagan gods and deities that have people have dreamed up for thousands of years.
- c. **“Has the Key of David”**: **What do you think this metaphorical KEY is that only Jesus holds?** The key of death and Hades. Jesus holds the key to heaven and has the authority to open the door to heaven for some, and closes it to others. He is the keeper. **So how important is Jesus? Does just belief in God as an intellectual assent bring salvation and entrance into heaven?** The ENTIRE Bible is eccentric. You can find Jesus in some form or another in every book of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

6. Praises (3:8)

- a. You may not be called to be a Billy Graham or Mother Teresa, but according to Jesus, do the works and witness you do rank as high and esteemed as them?
- b. **Jesus notes that they have “little strength” meaning they were small in number and had little cultural influence. Does their size matter to Christ?** Absolutely not. All that mattered to Him was that they were staying true to His name. Their ministry to spread the gospel would continue and grow because the door Christ opened was one “no one can shut.” **Do you think it is easier to witness and do Christ’s work in smaller numbers or larger numbers? Is it harder by yourself or with others in a group? Do you see any significance on why I am always stressing about our youth group staying a strong GROUP and building upon it with new Christians?**

- c. **Why are you still here on earth after becoming a Christian? Why is Christ keeping the door open for you?** We are still here because we are tasked to spreading the gospel. The question is if we are taking advantage of every open door God puts before us??

7. **Admonitions (?)**

- a. **Jesus had no admonitions to the believers at Philadelphia"**

8. **Promises (3:9-13)**

- a. Do you believe there will be different rewards given in heaven in turn for the works and persecution you may endure here on earth?
- b. **"They will be acknowledged as true followers of the Messiah": What does this mean for you as a Christian?** While you may endure persecution right now, you will be vindicated!!
- c. **"They will escape the coming tribulation":** Jesus promises to deliver them from the "hour of testing". Since Jesus speaks often in the Bible about all Christians having to endure hardships, this "hour of testing" is a time of hardship Jesus promises Christians will not endure. It appears Jesus is telling them they will not have to endure the seven-year tribulation period (when Christian persecution reaches a new level). They will be "raptured". **What does this mean for you as a Christian?** If God decides for Jesus to return in your lifetime, you will be raptured before the seven year tribulation.
- d. **"They will soon see the Lord":** The bible has many stories of an unfaithful Christian losing their rewards here on earth, and those rewards given to someone else that does remain faithful. Think of the unfaithful steward parable, Esau losing his birthright, Saul losing his kingdom, and Judas losing his apostleship. **What does this mean for you as a Christian?** For Christians, there is such a thing as different rewards in heaven based on how faithful you are to Jesus and his mission while you are here on earth. If you remain faithful because you are always prepared for Jesus return, you will be rewarded.
- e. **"They will be established in God's temple":** Philadelphia suffered countless earthquakes and had to continuously live in temporary housing, move, and rebuild their homes. Jesus is telling them that there is coming a day they will never have to move again. A day they will be protected and can stay forever. **What does this mean for you as a Christian?** Your faith in Christ guarantees you a future, eternal home where nothing and no one can ever harm you again.
- f. **"They will be forever identified with Christ":** Jesus is telling the believers in Philadelphia that He will write the name of God on all of them and his new name. Jesus came to earth first as the savior, to be nailed to a cross and to die. Three days later, he arose from the dead and forty days later ascended into heaven. He became an overcomer of death and sin and that what is promised to those that are identified with Christ. **What does this mean for you as a Christian?** In the movie Toy Story, Andy writes his name on Buzz Lightyear and Woody. Why? Andy was in essence saying, "You belong to me. I'm going to take care of you." Your faith in Christ guarantees that Jesus will also write his name on you!!