

Revelation Notes

Chapter 3

Introductory thoughts

In chapter 3 we will look at the remaining three churches that Christ addressed. As is true for all the letters, each church is addressed specifically with specific praises and warnings. Only two (2) of the seven (7) churches did not receive a rebuke. Namely **Smyrna** and **Philadelphia**.

Locale: Sardis “The metropolis of Lydia in Asia Minor. It stood on the river Pactolus, at the foot of mount Tmolus. Here was one of the seven Asiatic churches #Re 3:1-6 It is now a ruin called Sert-Kalessi.” - Online Bible (Easton’s Bible Dictionary). Sardis was located in what is now Modern Turkey.

Sardis was founded around 1200 B.C. It was the capital city of Lydia. Gold was taken from the nearby Pactolus River. It was located about 30 miles south of Thyatira. Sardis sat on a large hill (acropolis) some 1500 feet above sea level. It was surrounded by huge rock walls on three sides and could only be approached from the south. This resulted in false security for its rulers. In 549 B.C. the Persians scaled the rock walls at night and captured the city. In 195 B.C. Antiochus the Great hired Cretans to scale the rock walls. Eventually in 133 B.C. the Romans did the same. (See MacArthur, *The New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1-11, p. 111)

The Dead Church

1 ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

The Address: Unto the angel of the church in Sardis.

“Seven Spirits of God” represents the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit.

“Seven stars” = Pastors or messengers.

The Reprimand: “You have a name that you are alive but are dead.”

Comment: Sardis gave the appearance to those around that she was alive and well but Christ sees all with his piercing gaze into the heart. Jesus looked at Sardis and saw their true condition.

What had caused this? Though we are not specifically told; the answer is undoubtedly sin. The church had compromised the truths of God's word. They undoubtedly had winked at false teachings and sin in the church.

MacArthur asks the question: "What are the danger signs that a church is dying?" Here is his answer: "When it is content to rest on its past laurels, when it is more concerned with liturgical forms than spiritual reality; when it focus more on curing social ills rather than changing peoples hearts through the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ; when it is more concerned with what men think than what God said; when it loses its conviction that every word of the Bible is the Word of God..." *ibid.* pp. 111-112

- 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

"Be watchful" = Become alert or wake up.

"Strengthen the things which remain"

-Obviously there was hope for this church. Christ gave them the prescription for restoration..

"For I have not found your works complete before God."

- The deeds or works that the church performed was done with impure motives. They were going through the motion. Everything on the surface appeared to be fine but they were living a lie. (Cf. The story of Samson) Samson was unaware that the Lord had departed from him and we all know the tragic story of Samson's life. When we as believer's compromise with sin, we lose our spiritual power. We may continue going through the motions but nothing will become of it.

- Jesus stated in Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."

- 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

“Remember therefore...”

- Christ calls on the Sardis believers to remember. This is similar to the Ephesian church when they were called to remember. Christ wills to restore the power and witness of his churches.

“how you have received and heard and hold fast and repent...”

- What is it that they had received? The Gospel of Christ. They had received the doctrine of the Gospel. Doctrine is so very important. Many people today say they are not interested in doctrine. One cannot preach or teach the Word of God without doing so doctrinally.
- They were instructed to cling to faithfully that which they had received.
- They were told to repent, i.e., turn around and move back toward the principles and truths of God’s Word. Run away from compromise. Oust those who were teaching falsely and stop tolerating sin.

“If you will not watch I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come.”

- If you will not wake up or remain alert I’ll come upon you totally unexpected. This of course is a clear warning of God’s judgment.

- 4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

“You have a few names...that have not defiled their garments...”

- The people of Sardis would have well understood this imagery. Wool was dyed in Sardis. “Defiled” comes from the Greek word *moluno*. *Moluno* means to stain, pollute, to smear.
- Thus, there were a few genuine believers’ in the church at Sardis.

“and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

- Those who walk with Christ in this human life in purity and holiness will receive the perfect robe of purity and holiness in heaven. **“Garments” symbolize character in the Bible. Cf. Isa. 64:6; Jude 23).**

- 5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

“I will not blot out his name out of the book of life...”

- Note that Christ promises all those who overcome that they shall be clothed in white raiment and their names will not be blotted out of the book of life.

“I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.”

- Matt. 10:32-33

“Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

- 6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Again the call to heed what He is saying. Note that it is always applicable to all the churches.

The Church of Philadelphia 3: 7-13

Locale: Philadelphia was situated on a hill some 800 feet above sea level. It was founded around 189 B.C. by one of two brothers. Either, King Eumenes of Pergamum or Attalus II who followed after him. The city was named after the latter's nickname: *Philadelphus*.

Philadelphia was primarily a cultural center for the spread of Hellenism, i.e., Greek culture.

It lay approx. 30 miles southeast of Sardis.

Note: Philadelphia received no reprimand from Christ, only praise.

The Faithful Church

- 7 ¶ And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

The Address: “Unto the angel of the church of Philadelphia

Comments

Christ’ identification: “He that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens and no man shuts and shuts and no man opens.

- “holy” depicts both Christ’ purity and deity.
- “true” implies that Christ is genuinely God.
- “key of David” is a clear indication of Christ’ Messianic entity.
- “who opens...shuts...” speaks of Christ’ omnipotence.

- 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

“I know your deeds...” Christ saw only good things in the church at Philadelphia.

“I have set before you an open door and no man can shut it...”

- *“The open door symbolizes a gift of missionary opportunity and spiritual usefulness to the church by Christ. It means that he gave them greater opportunities and privileges for service as a reward for faithful service.” – Ray Frank Robbins, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1975, p.75*

It is noteworthy how God’s power can flow through any congregation that is obedient and desirous to glorify Jesus.

“You have a little strength...” This was not a put down, rather it signified the reality that the church were few in number.

“and have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

- The members were obedient to the Teachings and Principles of God’s Word in the face of trials and persecution.

- The Old cliché states: “That dynamite comes in small packages.”, would have been true for this small church. They were committed and faithful to God’s Word. God noted their faithfulness and great rewards were promised.
- 9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews...”

- This appears to be an allusion to the Jews who were persecuting the Christians. Who is a true Jew? See Romans 2:28-29:
- *“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”*

“behold I will make them to come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you.”

-MacArthur states that this means that some of those who had been persecuting the church at Philadelphia will actually become Christians themselves and in so doing, they will bow down in total submission to the Gospel. Secondly, in doing so, they will know how much Christ loves the church.

- 10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

“Because you have kept the word of my perseverance...”

- *“hupomone” (Grk) = steadfastness and endurance in trying circumstances.” Ibid.*
- Because the church had been faithful and persevered the attacks, hardships and persecution, Christ made them a personal promise, i.e.,.....

“I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world...”

-Both MacArthur and Robbins, who are in differing camps on the end time view agree that this is a clear reference to the “Great Tribulation” which shall come near the end of time. This speaks to the Pretribulation perspective on Revelation.

Since it has already been well established each letters truths apply to all churches, it is easy to see the promise that is made here. Christ promised his people that they would be kept from the Great Tribulation, thus the concept of the Rapture is here substantiated.

“The hour of testing Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:25-27), the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), the seven-year tribulation period.” MacArthur, p. 124.

11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

“Behold, I come quickly...”

- This coming is not one of warning but one of promise. When Christ told the other churches that if they did not repent he would come quickly, He was speaking in terms of judgment. Here Christ speaks a promise which undoubtedly would have brought joy to the church at Philadelphia.

“hold fast what you have that no man take your crown.”

- grip tightly or cling to.
- True believers will persevere to the end and those who do not show that they were not true believers. See I Jn. 2:19.

12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name.

Note: There are four (4) promises made in this verse.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God...”

- True believers will have a permanent dwelling place in heaven. This imagery of a pillar is symbolic of the permanence and stability of relationship with God. There is no contradiction here. (See Rev. 21:22)

“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”

“And I will write upon him the name of my God, and than name of the city of my God...and I will write upon him my new name.

- The name of my God is a symbolism for the ownership of God upon ones being. Thus being indicative of the permanence of eternal relations with God.
- The name of the city of my God symbolizes security and safety. Ones citizenship is in heaven who knows Christ.
- My new name speaks of the fullness of Christ’s glory that we shall witness and learn of when in his presence. See I Jn. 3:2.

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

- 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The appeal for those who have spiritual sensitivity to take heed and obey.

The Church of Laodicea 3:14-22

Locale: Laodicea lay approximately 100 miles East of Ephesus and about 40 miles South/southeast of Philadelphia. The city was located on a plateau and was of great importance to the region. It was so wealthy that in 60 A.D. when it was devastated by an earthquake, the city officials rejected money offered by the Roman government to help them rebuild.

Laodicea was founded by Antiochus II approximately 255B.C. and was named after his wife. Laodicea had to pipe in their water by aqueducts which were several miles in length. This of course was easy for an invading army to cut off, even though the city itself was difficult to invade due to its natural fortifications.

Laodicea, The Hypocrite Church

Comments

14 ¶ And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

The Address: “Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write...”

The Identification of Christ: “Saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”

- Jesus’ every word is accurate and true. Unlike the Laodiceans whose lives were lukewarm and fickle.
- The “Amen” affirms that Christ’ judgments are accurate and unquestionable.
- Jesus is the Amen because he is confirmed all the promises of God.

“Faithful and true witness”

- Everything that Jesus had to say was trustworthy. Thus the Laodicean church could be certain that Jesus’ assessment of their situation was 100% correct.
- Illustration: Certificate of Authenticity.

“The beginning of the Creation of God.”

- Christ was not a created being. Rather, the Greek word for beginning here is *arche*, which means the source or origin of creation. Thus Jesus Christ is the very source or origin of Creation. **See John 1:3 and Colossians 1:15-17.**

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

There was no commendation for this church.

“I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot: I wish you were cold or hot.”

- Christ who knew the spiritual state of each church could accurately assess this church and his assessment is that they are not in earnest with God but not totally indifferent to Him. There was no warmhearted faithfulness to Christ or love, only the appearance of it. –Robbins, p. 79
- **Laodicea was the epitome of hypocrisy.**
- Jesus preferred that they would move out of their lukewarm state.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

The Rebuke: Because you are lukewarm I will spit you out of my mouth.

MacArthur states: “Hot people are those who are spiritually alive and possess the fervency of a transformed life. The spiritually cold...are best understood as those who reject Jesus Christ. They have no interest in Christ, His Word or His church. And they make no pretense about it; they are not hypocrites.” P. 136

- Lukewarm symbolizes insincerity, hypocrisy and self-deceit.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

“Because you say, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing...”

- The danger of Pride
- The danger of Self-deceit.

“And you don’t know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

- Laodicea’s true spiritual state. They were bankrupt.
- Spiritually destitute, spiritually blind and spiritually naked.

- 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

The invitation to True Riches.

- Jesus invited them to buy gold tried in the fire.
 - Jesus invited them to buy white raiment to cover their nakedness and
 - Jesus invited them to buy salve (ointment) for their eyes that they might have spiritual sight.
 - **This imagery pertains to salvation. Christ is inviting them to place their faith and trust in him. He alone is the way of salvation. The idea of buying here is similar to that of Isa.55:1.**
- 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Tough Love

Jesus disciplines all who are his. The discipline is a demonstration of His love for the church and for individual believers.

Keep on being zealous
Repent.

- 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

The Invitation to Fellowship

- Jesus had every right to come against this church in swift judgment but here we see the tenderness of Christ, inviting those in the church of Laodicea to dine with him. This symbolizes a call to Salvation. He invites them to open the doors of their heart to him before it is too late. When the night of judgment comes it will be too late.
- “Sup with him and he with me”, symbolizes the fellowship that would exist between Jesus and those who open their hearts to him as Savior.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Reigning with Christ

Believers will reign with Christ. (See II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 20:6; I Cor. 6:3).

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

There is an interesting difference in the address to the Laodiceans than any of the other churches, namely, an extended invitation.

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