

The Things Which Remain

Revelation 3:1-6 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. **2** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. **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. **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. **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. **6** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

I. The Church at Sardis

Sardis was the capital city of Lydia. It was situated in a valley at the foot of the Tmolus Mountains and was a well fortified and isolated city. As the capital of the Lydian kingdom, it was by no means a poor city. Through the succession of kingdoms, it passed from Persian control to Greek and ultimately was under Roman rule by the time we read of it in the New Testament. Its wealth is attested to by the vast temple that was created there for the Greek god Artemis.

1. History

- a. It was the flourishing, wealthy capital of the Lydian Kingdom.
- b. It was located at the base of the Tmolus Mountains, isolated from surrounding areas.

For a time, the Christian church located there, thrived. However, by the time the Lord sent the message found in Revelation they had dwindled substantially. What was the cause? It is important to note that there is no indication of external persecution upon this church as we read with some of the other churches of Asia Minor. Additionally, there is no indication of false teaching that had spread among them.

2. Condition

- a. Outwardly: They had a good reputation in the eyes of others.
- b. Inwardly: Described as "dead", they were spiritually lifeless.

- c. Prognosis: It was said they were "ready to die"; the disbanding of the church was eminent.

Their decline was the result of internal problems. They had a name that they were alive. In other words, they had a respectable reputation. Outwardly, they had the appearance of being in better condition than what they were spiritually. Given the evidence it would appear that their downfall was complacency derived from compromise. By compromising with the society that surrounded them, they failed to fulfill their Christian duties.

3. Implications

- a. The problem in Sardis was worldliness. They conformed to society.
- b. Their interest in preserving a reputation among those outside the church had taken their focus away from Christ.
- c. Their worship had become unsatisfactory to the Lord.

II. Sardis in our churches today

Our Baptist churches in America have long enjoyed a history of spiritual prosperity. The church house was once full and the message was powerful. For too long we have gleaned from the spiritual wealth of our forefathers. Our outward prosperity has come at the expense of spiritual poverty. Many of our churches today are in a state of spiritual decline. The future of our churches largely depends on how we respond.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

1. We have conformed to this world and failed to be "transformed by renewing of our mind."
 - a. We have invested too much in temporal gain and have become spiritually stagnant.
2. We have been more concerned with our reputation among men than we have of our reputation with God.
3. As a result, we have lost the quality of worship that God desires.
 - a. We have lost our influence.
 - b. We have dwindled, and those which remain are weak.

III. Strengthen the things which remain

The Lord's solution for the Church in Sardis was to "strengthen the things which remain". The answer was not to abandon the work or even seek to expand it at this time but rather to preserve what remained and was faithful. We are living in the age of the American Megachurch and are surrounded by the mentality that bigger is better, that there is strength in numbers. However, this has never been a reality of New Testament teaching. At times, the churches were certainly large but the focus has always been on quality and not quantity. If we will focus on the quality of our Christian walk and the quality of our services, in time God will add laborers and give increase. In the meantime, we must "strengthen the things which remain"

1 Corinthians 12:20-23 But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.**21** And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

1. A Church is made up of many members. Not each is the same. However, every member is necessary. We must strengthen one another.
 - a. Our young people represent our future. We must invest in them. They need to be taught by the older members, encouraged to participate and listened to. They need Godly friendships and a safe place to grow, if they do not find it in the churches they will seek it elsewhere. We can not afford the loss of any more of our young people to this present evil world.
 - b. Our elderly members contain in their minds and souls a treasure house of wisdom gained from the experiences of life. Talk to them, ask them questions, seek their advice. They should not be overlooked. They need to know that their work is not finished until they are called home.

1 Corinthians 12:22-23 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:**23** And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

- c. Existing in every church there is a group of members who may be mistaken as un-interested. They are quiet. They are not the preachers or deacons, they do not lead singing or teach Sunday School. They are often overlooked when in reality they are an untapped resource. Invest in them and many will flourish.

2. Our services are not lacking any component. They are not lacking in order. They are lacking genuineness. If we are going to strengthen our services we do not need to change what we do but we must do it from the fullness of our hearts.

a. Effective prayer produces effective worship. **James 5:16**

Ephesians 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

- b. Our singing must come from the heart. When it does, it edifies.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

- c. Our fellowship is pleasing to God and a witness to those who are lost. If we weep with one another, we will also be able to rejoice together.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.**3** And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.**4** And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:**5** That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

- d. Our preaching must be clear and powerful, we can not achieve this without the Holy Spirit.

3. Our influence must be strengthened.

Matthew 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat:**32** But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.