

Hymns:           12 I'll Fly Away                           53 Nothing but the Blood of Jesus  
                  64 There Is Power in the Blood       Whiter than Snow

Scripture:       Psalm 24; 51:7-17

Big idea: The Stain of Sardis

President Andrew Jackson in his 1837 farewell address, used the now oft-quoted statement , “The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.” That has proven true throughout the ages. In a few minutes we will look at how that applies to the ancient city and church at Sardis as we ...

continue our **trip** through the fascinating book of Revelation. We learned that this final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse* unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but instead it reveals Him in His glory. The imagery of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation describes a person of great majesty and power.

Yet despite Jesus having this frightening appearance, His demeanor towards His own is tender and gracious. We learned that we who know Him will receive a perfect, immortal body like His that can float through the air, pass through walls, materialize, dematerialize, and even fly through the clouds and beyond.

So far, we've visited the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira. First century Ephesus boasted a large, prosperous port and transportation hub and featured the temple of Diana, the pagan goddess of fertility. While that church did many good deeds, its heart was not right. It had lost its first love of the LORD and was **just** going through the motions. The irony of this was that that a city obsessed with *sensual* love would have a church whose prime weakness was its *spiritual* love.

Next, we moved on in our travels to Smyrna, a city that lies 30 to 40 miles to the north of Ephesus on the western tip of what is now Turkey. The large, prosperous city today, called Izmir, engulfs the ruins of ancient Smyrna making them seem to be almost an afterthought as the development around the site overshadows what seems more like a city block. Jesus had only commendation and encouragement for them to persevere. He assured them that their days of persecution were numbered and would pale in comparison to the glorious future awaiting them in eternity.

Next, we traveled to Pergamos. Located about 60 miles north of Smyrna and inland about 20 miles from the sea along the Caicus River, the city on a hill called an acropolis contains extensive ruins of ancient Pergamos within the city now called Bergama. On this acropolis stood many monuments and temples. Pergamos produced an alternative writing medium called parchment. It boasted a library of 200,000 volumes, a medical center, and much more. While Ephesus was a commercial center, and Smyrna became a political center, Pergamos was a religious center.

Last time, we traveled to Thyatira which lies about 30 miles southeast of Pergamos. The city was famous for having more commercial guilds (unions) than any Roman city. It was where Lydia the seller of purple had lived. Today, the chief industry there is rug-making. If you travel to Thyatira, you will not

see much. Much like with Smyrna, the city overwhelms the ruins (surrounded by a wrought iron fence looks more like a town square or mini park.). The rest of the ruins remain buried under the many surrounding buildings. Thyatira had a problem with its church leader – a wicked woman referred to as Jezebel who led them into bad doctrine, fornication, and idolatry.

Today, we travel to the fifth of the seven churches of Revelation to Sardis. The Bible mentions Sardis only in the book of Revelation chapters 1 and 3. We read the following from *Smith's Bible Dictionary*.

Sardis:

*was a city ... situated about two miles to the south of the river Hermus,.... It was [30 miles southeast of Thyatira and] 60 miles northeast of Smyrna. .... [It was known for the] extremely fertile neighboring region and [for] its convenient [location, and] commercial ... importance... The massive temple of Cybele still bears witness in its fragmentary remains to the wealth and architectural skill of the people that [built] it. On the north side of the acropolis, overlooking the valley of the Hermus, is a theatre near 400 feet in diameter, attached to a stadium [seating] about 1,000. There are still considerable remains of the ancient city at Sert-Kalessi. Travellers describe the appearance of the locality as that of complete solitude. ...*

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* fills in more details concerning this city.

Sardis:

*sar'-dis (Sardeis): ... was ... one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor, and until 549 BC, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. It stood on the northern slope of Mt. Tmolus; its acropolis occupied one of the spurs of the mountain. At the base flowed the river Pactolus which served as a moat, rendering the city practically impregnable. Through the failure to watch, however, the acropolis had been successfully scaled [on two separate occasions].*

*... In 334 BC it surrendered to Alexander the Great who gave it independence, ... In 301 BC, it fell into the possession of the Seleucidan kings who made it the residence of their governor. It became free again in 190 BC, when it formed a part of the empire of Pergamos, and later of the Roman province of Asia. In 17 AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake, the Roman emperor Tiberius remitted the taxes of the people and rebuilt the city, and in his honor the citizens of that and of neighboring towns erected a large monument, but Sardis never recovered its former importance . . . . In 295 AD, Sardis [again] became the capital of Lydia,*

*The city continued to flourish until 1402, when it was so completely destroyed by Tamerlane that it was never rebuilt. Among the ruins there now stands a small village called Sert, a corruption of its ancient name. ...*

*The ancient city was noted for its fruits and wool, and for its temple of the goddess Cybele, whose worship resembled that of Diana of Ephesus also called Artemis. Its wealth was also partly due to the gold which was found in the sand of the river Pactolus, and it was here that*

*gold and silver coins were first struck. During the Roman period its coins formed a beautiful series, and are found in abundance by the peasants who till the surrounding fields. The ruins of the buildings which stood at the base of the hill have now been nearly buried by the dirt washed down from above. The hill upon which the acropolis stood measures 950 ft. high: the triple walls still surround it. The more imposing of the ruins are on the lower slope of the hill, and among them the temple of Cybele is the most interesting, yet only two of its many stone columns are still standing. Equally imposing is the necropolis [a cemetery] of the city, which is at a distance of two hours' ride from Sert, South of the Gygaean lake. The modern name of the necropolis is ... Thousand Mounds, because of the large group of great mounds in which the kings and nobles were buried. Many of the mounds were long ago excavated and plundered...*

### Revelation 3:1-6

#### Revelation 3

*[1] And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things sa[ys] he that ha[s] the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;*

We learned in chapter one (Revelation 1:4) that the seven Spirits of God refers to the seven aspects of the Holy Spirit and His completeness. The same chapter described the seven stars as the messengers to the seven churches (Revelation 1:20).

*I know [your] works,  
that [y]ou ha[ve] a [reputation] that [y]ou live[], and  
ar[e] **dead**.*

You may recall the tennis star of the 1990's Andre Aggasi and his classic ad campaign for Cannon saying, "Image is everything." Jesus tells the church at Sardis that image is *not* everything. He said something very similar to the Pharisees during His earthly ministry.

#### Matthew 23

*[27] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for y[ou] are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward[ly], but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

Jesus may also be playing on the fact that one of the distinguishing features of Sardis was that huge graveyard with a thousand mounds.

*[2] Be watchful,*

There's that word again that Jesus used in His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:42-43; Matthew 25:13). There you recall He explained the importance of living in expectation of a reckoning. Here, He admonishes this church to do the same.

*and strengthen the things which remain,  
that are ready to **die**:*

These good deeds are withering on the vine. He again makes reference to **death** which supports the notion He has their famous graveyard in mind.

*for I have **not** found [your] works perfect before God.*

What exactly is God looking for?

Psalm 24

*[4] He that ha[s] clean hands, and a pure heart;  
who ha[s] **not** lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.*

*[3] Remember therefore [what] [y]ou ha[ve] received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.*

The Apostle Paul spent two years preaching and teaching just down the road in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Certainly, Sardis could not say they had not heard the truth of the Word of God.

*If therefore [y]ou shal[l] **not** watch,  
I will come on [you] as a thief, and [y]ou shal[l] **not** know what hour I will come upon [you].*

Again, this repeats the warning Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:42). As we learned, the history of Sardis included two incidents when they failed to watch and were defeated by invading armies. Jesus' admonition certainly struck a cord with the people of this church.

*[4] [Y]ou ha[ve] a **few** names even in Sardis which have **not** defiled their garments;  
and they shall walk with me in **white**: for they are **worthy**.*

As so often is the case, a remnant of godly people remained.

*[5] He that overcome[s], ... 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.*

### **Book of Life**

What is this Book of Life?

This somewhat puzzling expression appears eight times in the Bible – Once in Philippians 4:3 and seven times in this book of Revelation. It refers to who will

and who will not

gain entrance into glory and receive eternal life. The verse in Philippians, in today's

verse Revelation 3:5, as well as in Revelation 21:27; 22:19 each speak of those whose names **are** there and Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15 speak of those whose names are **not** in the book.

When were their names recorded there? Revelation 17:8 says *from the foundation of the world*. God knew before we are born (and before **anyone** was born for that matter) whether or not we would accept His free gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

In our current verse, Revelation 3:5, Jesus speaks of **not** blotting out a name from His book. Some false teachers try to turn this around and conclude that names **can** be blotted out, but that's not what Jesus said. This verse actually supports the doctrine that once you are saved, you cannot ever lose your salvation because it is an act of God.

Still, you may also recall four somewhat similar instances in the Bible where this issue of names being blotted out of or being in a book is mentioned. They are:

1. Moses, in Exodus 32:32, asked God to blot out his life if God could not forgive the Israelites. God replied to Moses in the next verse that He instead would take the lives of those Israelites that sinned against Him and immediately did so with a plague (Exodus 32:34-35).
2. David in a Messianic Psalm (frequently quoted in the New Testament relating to Jesus Christ) asked God to blot out the lives of his own people who persecute him (Psalm 69:28).
3. Daniel speaks of those *written in the book* will be **delivered** from the Great Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2).
4. Paul longed for the salvation of his fellow Jews (Romans 10:1) and even offered a **hypothetical** suggestion to let himself be *accursed from Christ* (Romans 9:3) to achieve that end. Despite knowing that was not possible (Ephesians 4:30; Romans 8:38-39), he was willing to sacrifice himself much like Christ did in order to bring salvation to his brethren.

After reminding this church to **be vigilant**, Jesus gives them the same the ending admonition to **heed His warning** which He gives to each of the seven churches.

*[6] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sa[ys] unto the churches.*

### Application

Easton's Bible Dictionary gives the following information regarding the Sardine Stone:

...from a root meaning "red" ... a gem of a blood-red colour. It was called "sardius" because [its name derived] from **Sardis** in Lydia. .... It is our red carnelian.

So how can we pull this all together? The church at Sardis, in a city known for producing wool garments and dyeing them, was dyeing itself. Sardis urgently needed to clean up its act. All but a remnant had stained garments. They needed to remove that bright red stain from their garments. Jesus made a blood sacrifice for them and for all mankind that when they accept His gift they too can be cleansed and have garments white as pure wool.

And unlike most of the church of Sardis, we who have accepted His free gift of grace ought to live each hour and each day in a way that honors our LORD through the power of His Spirit. Jesus said:

Matthew 6

*[16] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

**Benediction**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:21).*