

## 7 Churches Tour – 2019 - Sardis

### Introduction

- 40 miles south of Thyatira is Sardis. It was originally located on a mountain spur, atop 1,000 feet high sheer cliffs, and considered itself impregnable. In ancient times, the proverbially wealthy king, Croesus made Sardis his capital (560-546BC), his treasure was kept in Sardis, and coins were first minted in Sardis.
- Yet, some soldiers of Cyrus the Great climbed the sheer cliff in 547BC (just before he conquered Babylon), and they found the city asleep. The inhabitants felt perfectly safe. Cyrus' soldiers opened the main gates from the inside, the main army poured in, and Sardis was conquered. Sardis dwindled over the years into obscurity, reminding its surviving population of the painful price for their lack of vigilance.

### The Message to the Church of Sardis

- **Rev. 3.1-6.** Sardis represents the era of the Reformation (1560s – 1790s). This was an era in which the Church uncovered its source – the Word of God. The Reformation peeled back centuries of tradition, priests, ignorance and superstition. Greek and Hebrew scholarship flourished, and the Bible was freely translated and published in many languages and countries. Wherever the Word of God went, it wrought an incredible work of personal transformation and ecclesiastical reformation.
- Yet, like ancient Sardis, who fell asleep in their misplaced sense of security, the church of Sardis is asleep. The dynamism of change has stagnated into dogmas. The Augsburg Confession. The 39 Articles. The Westminster Confession. Rather than mining Scripture for truth, theologians focused on defending their creedal statements.
- A concern for correctness of doctrine prevailed over a personal encounter and relationship with the living God. National Protestant churches were established, e.g. the C of E, Lutheran Church of Denmark, Dutch Reformed, and in turn persecuted dissenters. The Pilgrim Fathers fled persecution at the hands of English Protestants. Calvin executed fellow reformers. Luther raged against Jews and Catholics for refusing the Reformation. Luther's own bitter writings against the Jews sowed the seeds for the Nazi Holocaust. "The Jews and their Lies."
- The Sardis church is self-sufficient, and is spiritually asleep, secure behind the walls of their creedal statements and institutional churches. Jesus appeals directly to the slumbering saints. Wake up! Remember! Obey! Repent! Strengthen! All imperatives. "I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!"
- The situation in Sardis is serious, but as in Thyatira, Jesus has His faithful remnant. "Yet you still have a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes." A faithful minority endures, as in every generation.
- If this faithful remnant awakes, remembers their early spiritual vitality, moves beyond their dreary creedal statements so that they do indeed walk with Jesus, and put on afresh His robe of righteousness, then – as He promises – there is the promise of eternal life.
- For those who do not wake up but who slumber on in their self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, Jesus promises to blot their name from the Book of Life. When does this happen? It happens when Jesus "Confesses your name before my Father and before His angels." Again, as in Thyatira, the pre-advent judgment is implied.
- Nicolaitan Christians will not receive eternal life with their denial of the validity of the Decalogue, nor will Balaamite, compromised Christians with their idols and immorality, nor will Jezebel Christians who unite church with state in a persecuting union. And neither will sleepy Protestants, who lazily depend on cognitive assent to intellectual statements of doctrine as being their passport to eternity rather than walking alongside Jesus day by day, in harmony with His teachings, and clothed in His robes of righteousness.

### Conclusion

- In this letter to Sardis, Jesus speaks as the "Faithful Witness" of 1.5. Eternity is too significant a prize to lose, and our time on earth is too short, for Jesus to beat about the bush. His desire is for all His children to be saved, even those Sardis Christians who rely on doctrinal correctness and abstract theological formulations rather than being born again as their passport to eternity.
- Ezekiel capture the heart of God so well, as He shares the heart of God towards His own professing people of Israel: "As I live, says the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn back from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O House of Israel?...Turn then, and live!" (Ezek. 33.10; 18.32).