

Sardis and Philadelphia: Moving from Perception to the Heart of the Matter

Revelation 3:1-13

1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: “The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. **2** Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. **4** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. **6** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

To the Church in Philadelphia

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: “The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

8 “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. **9** Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. **10** Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. **11** I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. **12** The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. **13** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

I. We are known.

Jesus says to the rich and powerful in verse 1, “I know your works.” He also says to the seemingly insignificant in verse 8, “I know your works.” Jesus personally knows each and every person in the world. All of us have the deep desire to be known and accepted by the people we love and care about. The fact that Jesus, Who holds the Holy Spirit (seven spirits of God) and the seven churches (the seven stars) in His hand and Who is Lord over all the cosmos, knows us is profoundly sobering and encouraging. It’s profoundly sobering because there is nowhere to hide; Jesus knows us. It’s profoundly encouraging because it doesn’t matter who you are, Jesus knows you and cares about you. Take comfort that you are intimately known by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that He wants you to know Him.

II. Jesus sees through us.

Whether you fall in the camp of those in Sardis who put up a facade, or of those in Philadelphia who had the perception of being weak, Jesus knows your heart. He always moves beyond perception and breaks down the facades and addresses our hearts. Though Sardis had the perception of being lively, Jesus knew that inside the heart was either dead or dying. Those in Sardis were either dead or dying spiritually because they fell victim to the temptation of compromise. They wanted a little bit of Jesus in their life but they also wanted to be well-rounded and to fit into culture. We all know that this sin of nominalist faith isn’t foreign to us in East Memphis. Everywhere we turn, we face the temptation to compromise and to get by with a half-hearted faith. Those in Philadelphia were on the opposite end of the spectrum. They were faithful to Christ and His mission, but were themselves

weak and were facing constant persecution for claiming Christ's name. Jesus looked beyond their circumstances and affirmed their heart.

What we learn from these two very different churches is this:

We must never look at our suffering and present weakness as a sign of God's abandonment but we must always see it as His invitation to know Him more deeply and to make Him known. The only thing that matters for the Christian is what Christ says about him. If you are in Christ, He says "you are my good and faithful servant." Don't seek the acceptance of man, all the while neglecting the acceptance offered to you in Christ (cf Rom 8:1).

III. Christ has a message He wants us to know: His promises.

Scholars will tell us that the main point of this passage is not the condemnations put before those in Sardis or the commendations put before those in Philadelphia, but the promises He puts before both. Jesus intends to remind those in Philadelphia of His promises in order to encourage them in their present suffering and weakness and remind those in Sardis in order to revive them unto life. He intends to do the same for you.

IV. What does Jesus desire from His bride?

a) If you are in the boat with those in Philadelphia, He wants you to press on. Jesus reached down into their present suffering and reminded them how precious and secure they were in Him and His kingdom. Let His promises encourage you and press on; for in Christ, you will be vindicated as the people of God.

b) If you are in the boat with those in Sardis, Jesus wants you to wake up! This requires remembering what you have already been given. You have been given the message of Christ and the Holy Spirit. With the message of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can overcome anything—including your desire to identify with the things of this world. Remember Christ isn't only offering to save you "from" something, He is also offering to save you "for" something. He is offering to clothe you in white and to give you an eternal name and home in Him! Lastly, this requires that you repent. Repentance isn't a bad thing. Nor is it something you should dread. It is one of God's greatest gifts that He ever gave to His people. All it means is that you turn away from curse and into blessing, which you do by believing His Gospel and claiming His name.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that Christ knows you intimately? Does this comfort you, sober you, or both? Why?
2. What are some ways in which a Christian can begin to decay spiritually?
3. What are the implications of compromise? (spiritually, evangelistically, etc.)

4. What promises of this world are you believing and therefore need to put to death?

5. What promises of Christ do you need to claim?

Going Deeper

1. Instead of a question, I want to put before you an exercise. Over the next season, write down every Gospel promise you come across in your devotion. After you do so, swim in their substance and allow them to become nestled in your heart.

Allow the promises of Christ this and everyday to encourage you in your faith and to revive you unto life.