

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

Message 14

Words: 6170

Scripture: Revelation 3:1-6

INTRO: The 7 cities of Revelation 2-3 that we refer to as the seven churches of Asia are in the modern country of Turkey. We hear more of Turkey in the news of late because of their hostility towards Israel. We started our Journey at the Mediterranean Sea, at the city of Ephesus, moved up the coast to Smyrna and then Perrgamos. We were traveling almost due north. But at Perrgamos we take a sharp turn to the right and head west and a little south and we come to Thyatira. At Thyatira we turn even more to the south, back in the direction towards the coast.

After I had spoken on the church of Thyatira, as I was memorizing the words to this church, I thought of a matter I could have stressed a little more. In 2:23 the Lord says of Jezebel: *I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.* I mentioned that it is important to see that we are not saved by works, and yet we must not see works as unimportant.

But in this verse the Lord says very specifically that He will give to each believer according to his works. And here is what I want to add. Every judgment in the Bible is according to works. Those who go to hell will suffer according to their deeds or works. Those who go to heaven will be rewarded according to their works. The judgment seat of Christ is a very important matter for every believer to ponder.

So consider for a moment the promises made to these churches. I believe they count for every believer. Ephesus: *To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.* Smyrna: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.* Perrgamos: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.* Thyatira, *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He*

*shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.*

No matter what life brings us in our pilgrimage here, if we remain faithful, if we are overcomers, the promises are sure and when they are fulfilled, everything we have endured in life for the Lord's sake will be worth it. So the writer to the Hebrews says to those who were faltering to lift up those feeble hands and straighten out the knees and move forward.

## V. SARDIS 1054-1517

### A. The Historical Purpose (3:1-6)

#### 1. The counselee 3:1a

##### 1) The counselee (3:1a)

So we want to now look at the church at Sardis, and we begin with the counselee, or those the Lord was addressing.

*3:1a And to the angel of the church in Sardis write...*

I have found William Barclay's histories of these cities most helpful. Let me read for you what he says about Sardis:

*THE archaeologist Sir William Ramsay said of Sardis that nowhere was there a greater example of the melancholy contrast between past splendor and present decay. Sardis was a city of degeneration. Seven centuries before this letter was written, Sardis had been one of the greatest cities in the world. There, the king of Lydia ruled over his empire in splendour. (Let me just mention that Sardis was the capital of Lydia.) At that time, Sardis was a city of the east and was hostile to the Greek world. Aeschylus, the Greek poet, wrote of it: 'They that dwelt by Tmolus pledged themselves to cast the yoke on Hellas.'*

*Sardis stood in the middle of the plain of the valley of the River Hermus. To the north of that plain rose the long ridge of Mount Tmolus; from that ridge, a series of hills went out like spurs, each forming a narrow plateau. On one of these spurs, 1,500 feet up, stood the original Sardis. Clearly, such a position made it almost impregnable. The sides of the ridge were smoothly precipitous; and only where the spur met the ridge of Mount Tmolus was there any possible approach into Sardis, and even that was difficult and steep. It has been said that Sardis stood like some gigantic watch-tower guarding the Hermus valley. The time came when the narrow space on the top of the plateau was too small for the expanding city; and Sardis grew around the foot of the spur on which the citadel stood. The name Sardis (Sardeis in Greek) is really a plural noun, for there were two towns, one on the plateau and one in the valley beneath.*

*The wealth of Sardis was legendary. Through the lower town flowed the River Pactolus, which was said in past days to have had gold-bearing waters from which much of the wealth of Sardis came. The greatest of the Sardian kings was Croesus, whose name is still commemorated in the saying 'as rich as Croesus'. It was with him that Sardis reached the highest point in its history, and it was with him that it plunged to disaster.*

*It was not that Croesus was not warned about where Sardis was heading. Solon, the Athenian law-giver and the wisest of the Greeks, came on a visit and was shown the magnificence and the luxury. He saw the blind confidence of Croesus and his people that nothing could end this splendour, but he also saw that the seeds of softness and of degeneration were being sown. And it was then that he uttered his famous saying to Croesus: 'Call no man happy until he is dead.' Solon knew only too well the chances and changes of life which Croesus had forgotten.*

*Croesus embarked upon a war with Cyrus of Persia which was the end of the greatness of Sardis. Again Croesus was warned, but he failed to see the warning. To get at the armies of Cyrus, he had to cross the River Halys. He took counsel of the famous oracle at Delphi and was told: 'If you cross the River Halys, you will destroy a great empire.'* Croesus took it as a promise that he would annihilate the Persians; it never crossed his mind that it was a prophecy that the campaign on which he had embarked would be the end of his own power.

*He crossed the Halys, engaged in battle and was routed. He was not in the least worried, for he thought that all he had to do was to retire to the impregnable citadel of Sardis, recuperate and fight again. Cyrus initiated the siege of Sardis, waited for fourteen days, then offered a special reward to anyone who would find an entry into the city. The rock on which Sardis was built crumbled easily. It was more like close-packed dried mud than rock. The nature of the rock meant that it developed cracks. A certain Mardian soldier called Hyeroeades had seen a Sardian soldier accidentally drop his helmet over the battlements and then make his way down the precipice to retrieve it. Hyeroeades knew that there must be a crack in the rock there by means of which an agile man could climb up. That night, he led a party of Persian troops up by the fault in the rock. When they reached the top, they found the battlements completely unguarded. The Sardians had thought themselves too safe to need a guard; and so Sardis fell. A city with a history like that knew what the risen Christ was talking about when he said: 'Watch!'*

*So, then, Sardis fell to Cyrus, because its defenders thought it too strong to need a guard. There were a few futile attempts at rebellion; but Cyrus followed a deliberate policy. He forbade any Sardian to possess any weapon of war. He ordered them to wear tunics and siskins, that is actor's boots, instead of sandals. He ordered*

*the Sardians to teach their sons lyre-playing, the song and the dance and retail trading. Sardis had been flabby already, but the last vestige of spirit was banished from its people and it became the city of the degeneration.*

*Sardis vanished from history under Persian rule for two centuries. In due time it was surrendered to Alexander the Great, and through him it became a city of Greek culture. And then history repeated itself. After the death of Alexander there were many claimants for the power. Antiochus, who became the ruler of the area in which Sardis stood, was at war with a rival called Achaeus. Achaeus sought refuge in the impregnable Sardis. For a year Antiochus besieged him; and then a soldier called Lagoras repeated the exploit of Hyeroeades. At night with a band of brave men he climbed the steep cliffs. The Sardians had forgotten their lesson. There was no guard there, and once again Sardis fell because it was not upon the watch.*

*In due time the Romans came. Sardis was still a wealthy city. It was a center of the woolen trade; and it was claimed that the art of dyeing wool was actually discovered there. It became a Roman assize town. In A.D. 17 it was destroyed by an earthquake which devastated the area. Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, in his kindness remitted all tribute for five years and gave a donation of 10,000,000 sesterces, that is 4000,000 pounds, towards rebuilding, and Saris recovered itself by the easy way.*

*When John wrote his letter to Sardis, Sardis was wealthy, but Sardis was degenerate. Even the once great citadel was now only an ancient monument on the hill top. There was no life, no spirit there. The once great Sardians were soft, and twice they had lost their city because they were too lazy to watch. And in the enervating atmosphere of degeneration and decay the Christian Church too had lost its vitality and its power, and was a corpse instead of a living church. The Christian*

*Church in Sardis was a degenerate Church in a degenerate city, end quote.*

[Barclay, William. The Revelation of John, Volume One: 1 (pp. 123-125). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.]

That is taken from William Barclay. Now once you hear that history this letter takes on new meaning. What we would not otherwise understand, is now easier to understand. Walvoord writes of this city, "Much of its wealth came from its textile manufacturing and dye industry, and its jewelry trade. Most of the city practiced pagan worship, and there were many mystery cults or secret religious societies. The magnificent Temple of Artemis dating from the fourth century B.C. was one of its points of interest and still exists as an important ruin" end quote. He goes on to say that a Christian church building has been discovered right next to the temple.

With regard to the name 'Sardis' J. B. Smith says it is probable that it comes from the Hebrew word, *sarid*, meaning *the rest* or *remnant*. That may be the significance of this city as representative of the time period it pictures, for verse 4 speaks of a few of Christians left. Tim Lahaye says it means 'the escaping ones' or those who 'come out'. Out of all this Ramsey calls this church the city of death.

I mentioned in the last message that many see this church as speaking of the time from the reformation. At present I cannot see that. Sir William Ramsey calls this church the dead church, and I think this describes the church during this time period. I think it pictures the time from 1054 to the early 1500's.

2) The counselor (3:1b)

We go to the first part of verse 3:

*3:1b ...These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars...*

We have two things to identify here. In Revelation 1:20 we learned that the seven stars speaks of the angels or messengers of the seven churches.

But what is meant by these seven spirits of God? Turn to Revelation 1:4. Revelation 1:4 says:

*1:4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,*

Turn now to chapter 4. We'll skip 3:1 which is the second references in Revelation to the seven spirits. In 4:5 we have this:

*4:5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

We go not to chapter 5:6. It says:

*5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

It is no easy task to determine what is meant by the seven spirits of God. In the past I have told you that God set up a tabernacle in heaven. I believe God set it up after man sinned. And He did it to deal with sin. Sin is the reason it is there.

Now the earthly tabernacle was a shadow of the real. But in the shadow we learn what is in the real one in heaven. From chapter 1:4 and 4:5 we learn that these seven spirits are before the

throne of God. Well, the throne of God is in the Holy of Holies. And in the tabernacle, in the holy place which is before the holy of holies was the seven branch candlestick. It had oil, and wicks and fire. It was the only light source in the tabernacle. There were no windows.

Turn to Isaiah 11. Now the oil, representing the Holy Spirit, came from one source but it ran into little cups on each of the branches of the candlestick. So there were seven flames. And I believe they picture the seven fold aspects of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:1-2 says:

*1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

There we have the seven spirits of God. Simon J. Kistemaker has an interesting insight here. He says: "The seven spirits describe the fullness of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus is sending forth from the Father (John 14:26; 15:26-27; Acts 2:33). Jesus says He has the seven spirits, that is, He has the fullness of the Holy Spirit and exercises authority over Him." Then he explains that Jesus commissions the Holy Spirit to help believers and unbelievers to get to know Him (150).

Now Revelation 5:6 says this:

*5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

So here we learn that the seven eyes are the seven Spirits of God, and they are sent into all the earth. Zechariah 4:6 says:



6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.

And then in verse 10 He says:

10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.

No doubt here is strong language to every pastor and even to every believer that the Lord sees everything. One of the attributes of God is that He is all-seeing. And here we learn how that works. Listen to 2 Chronicles 16:9a:

16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

So Sardis, the counselee, learns from the counselor, the Lord Jesus, that He is the one who has the pastor in His own authority, and that through the Holy Spirit He has insight into everything that is going on in the church at Sardis.

John McArthur says this: *It is the description of the one who writes the letter that speaks to the real issue; the one who has the Holy Spirit and who has in His hand true ministers, writes to a church that has neither, that has neither. They have forfeited the Holy Spirit and faithful leadership. They're being led by false leaders void of the Holy Spirit. The life and power of the Holy Spirit is not present. The illuminating of the Holy Spirit is not there. The enabling of the Holy Spirit is not there. There's no godly leadership there. Without the Holy Spirit and without godly leadership, the church was dead: a*

*church dominated by the flesh, dominated by sin, dominated by unbelief; mostly populated by the unregenerate, no life at all - although there would be some believers there who were indifferent and some who were faithful.*

John McArthur has produced a lot of good teaching material. Let me just say that because I quote him does not mean I approve of all he teaches or does. Some time ago I saw an ad in which he himself was involved for their Bible school, and I wondered just how far they are on the path to destruction.

Well, we are now about to see something we have not seen in the previous 4 churches. There is no commendation. There is nothing good to say about this church. The Lord does say He knows their works but nothing commendable follows that. And so we go to the criticism, and there is criticism.

### 3) The criticism (3:1c)

In the place where the commendation should come, this is what comes and we find it still in verse 1:

*...I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead...*

Now those are words worth pondering. Now there is a strange mixture of clauses here. I know your works. I know you are alive. I know that you have a name. But I know you are dead. Now how can you be dead but be alive? Well, that is true of by far the majority of people on earth! But it should never be true in the Church! As I understand it, they are professing believers who are physically alive, but they are spiritually dead! The church has not shut down. It is going through the motions of church life. But spiritual death has set in.

I believe that in North America many, many churches are dead but there are a lot of living people in them. Paul said in Ephesians 2:1, *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* You see, you can be alive physically but be spiritually dead.

When the prodigal son came to himself, he went back home and his father greatly rejoiced. In Luke 15:24 the father said, "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." In 1 Timothy 5:6 Paul speaks of certain widows like this: "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." Sin results in death. How can one be spiritually alive while one is enjoying sin? Can it be?

As far as we can tell from what is written to this church, they are untroubled by heresy. They are not persecuted. There is nothing troubling them from within nor from without. They are dead. A nominal Christian, a Christian in name only, is a dead Christian. He is alive but he is dead. He goes to church on Sunday but personal convictions and godliness does not run deep. Such a believer, when under pressure, lets truth give way to what he wants to believe. Barclay said Sardis was so dead it was not worth spending shot on. I ask you, is your Christian life worth the devil spending shot on you? Do you meet the devil head on time and again? Do you know the sensations when the devil is attacking? Have you learned to do battle with him in your mind and overcome? Have you found the blood of Christ a deliverance from the destroyer?

Let me mention one more thing he said, "A truly vital Church will always be under attack. A really live Church will necessarily be the conscience of the community, and because of that there will be many who will wish to silence it, and to eliminate it. 'Woe unto you,' said Jesus, 'when all men shall speak well of you!'" (Luke 6:26).

The other day my wife found a quote by Spurgeon. A picture came with it. On the picture was a snarling German Shepherd dog, looking up, with fangs bared as if he had someone up a tree. And the quote said, "If you follow Christ, you shall have all the dogs of the world yelping at your heels. If you would live so as to stand the test of the last tribunal, depend upon it the world will not speak well of you." And if the life of Christ is an example of this, then it is not only the unsaved world, but the religious world that will be doing the yelping.

Wim Malgo says that to have a good name can be a fatal danger. As an example he gives the Salvation Army. He writes, "More than 50 years ago when the Salvation Army started, they went forth in great power. In many parts of the world they were rejected and despised, because at that time they had a bad name; they were not recognized! But through the years they have become acceptable, and in our day they have a well established, and honored name in religion. But with this they have entered the most dangerous road in their history" end quote (126-7). Well, from what I have seen of the Salvation Army they have been dead for quite some time already. In some ways one is the safest when one has a bad name, but that is only true if it is for standing for the right things.

Now the Lord said this church had a name, but it was dead. If you drive from here to Grande Prairie, you will pass a service station. It has been dead for many years, but the sign says, "Open 24:7." To anybody who knows anything about service stations, one thing is very obvious, it is very dead. But there are many churches today that have a name. They are open 24:7, but very few can recognize the signs whether it is dead or alive. Because a lot of people go there, they automatically assume it is alive. But a lot of people is not necessarily a sign of life.

4) The counsel (3:2-3)

Well, come to verses 2-3, the counsel of the Lord to this church:

*...Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you...*

Now in these 2 verses we have four very important matters to take note of. The first is to be watchful. Oh what an important principle this is. No command of our Lord should have come with greater clarity to this city than to be watchful. We had the account shared here recently that professionals concluded that if a certain airplane pilot had been watchful in five crucial seconds, he could have spared himself and his whole plane load of passengers. One never knows which five seconds of life will be so very crucial. This city was so secure they did not have to have watchmen on the walls. Their strongest point became their weak point, their blind spot. Here is the warning, "Wake up. See where you are. Get involved in the work of the church.

Now, why did the Lord have to command them to be watchful? It is because He has not found their works perfect before God. That means they were not watchful. One of our young men gave a devotional on blind spots a while ago. Could it be that I have a blind spot somewhere? And he recommended for us to go to the Word of God to have any blind spot exposed if it should be there.

The illustration he used of blind spots was an airplane pilot who was slouching or relaxing in his seat. How fitting is that for our text, "Be watchful." An airplane load of passengers and two airplane crews lost their lives, and all of this

because possibly a pilot was too relaxed in his seat. In assessing the cause of the accident it is supposed that he had a five second window in which he could have spotted the plane that they hit only seconds later.

William Barclay says, "Temptation waits for our unguarded moments, and then attacks. A moment of passion may relax a man's self-control. A slackening of will may relax a man's resolution to have nothing to do with evil. A weariness of body or spirit may reduce a man's resistance of power. A time of over-confidence may prove a time of ruin. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance against temptation" (150). Well, Sardis was built for overconfidence, and it proved to be the city's ruin.

The second important imperative we have is to strengthen the things which remain. It is important to note that he does not say, "Strengthen the people or Christians that remain." It is a neuter. Strengthen the things that remain. There were some 'things' intact yet and they needed to be strengthened. The only commentator I found that mentioned this was J.B. Smith. Because of the neuter word 'things' he says, "The language employed may therefore include principles, activities, institutions, as well as individuals" (83).

Let me give an example of the need to strengthen some things that remain. I believe in the church prayer meeting. I believe it is among the most important of church meetings. That is one of the 'things' that remains here, but it is poorly attended. And how do you strengthen such things? Do you know why it is hard to keep the prayer meeting going? Because it is one thing the devil fights with all he has and he makes sure it is not important to us.

How many times have I not fought the flesh and the devil to go to prayer meeting, and never yet have I thought later, "Well, I might as well have

watched a hockey game." Many, many times I came home encouraged.

The Church was born in a prayer meeting, Acts 2. About 120 were gathered for prayer, and that on the Day of Pentecost. No doubt they had company coming from all over the known world as a million or more people gathered for Pentecost. But these were all in one accord in prayer. The Church was born in prayer, not preaching, or singing; but prayer. Now listen to Acts 2:41-42:

*41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

*42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

So the church at Sardis is instructed to strengthen the things that remain. And of these 'things' in Sardis the Lord says they are ready to die. In most churches the prayer meeting is not dying, it has died long ago.

So be watchful. Second, strengthen the things that remain. Just outside of town here we have a high tower. It provides a number of services to the community. But for that tower to continue to provide those services it has to be kept stable. And to keep it stable it has a number of guy lines. So let me liken that tower to a church and the guy lines to members, and one of those members is slacking off. Then another slacks off. If you have that from two different sides and movement back and forth is allowed, the whole thing will go out of service. So, let me ask you, as a member of this church, what do you do to add stability to the church?

May I ask you, what is God's most important work on earth today? If I am right, and I believe it is so, it is the Church. It is not the family or nor friends nor work, nor schooling or sports or

you can add anything else you want. And what is the Lord's command? Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain.

So we go to verse three for our third imperative for this dying church. He now says further, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard..." Now this seems out of order, you don't receive and then hear. John Gill explains it like this: "Remember how you received upon hearing..." That is, having heard, you received. Romans 10:14 says, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" So hearing comes first.

How did Sardis get to hear the Gospel? We don't know. But we have mentioned earlier of Ephesus, the first of these seven cities, that Paul taught here for about 2 years. Acts 19:10 says, "And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." So likely through Paul's ministry at Ephesus, either Paul himself or believers who traveled through Sardis from there spread the word of the Gospel to them.

Not the Lord is telling them to remember. A while ago I spoke to you about the part of the mind called the *mneemee*, the memory. Some things we are to forget, others we are to remember and here is one the Lord wants them to call to memory. In remembering we pull things out of the storage part of our mind and put it into the thinking part and thus remember. Now the tense of to remember here is present and Barclay points out it means to constantly remember. Someone came with the Gospel to Sardis and the truth of it so gripped them that they repented of their sins and turned to the Lord. Before this they had been steeped in the teachings of all kinds of false gods, but this salvation took such hold of them that they truly repented, but they needed to constantly remember what happened. Hebrews 3:14



*says, For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.*

Our fourth imperative this dying church is this: hold fast. Those who were still believers were counseled to hold fast, and to repent. Again, it would seem that they should repent and then hold fast. But the order is reversed. How so? They are counseled to remember how they received the word upon hearing it, and when they have remembered that, they are to hold fast to that.

Let me illustrate. Let us say I backslide, as no doubt this church had. And I am slowly dying spiritually. And now I remember how once I repented and lived victoriously by faith. Now I am to hold fast to that, and repent of every area where I went astray. So it is, hold fast, now that you have remembered and repent.

So our last imperative is to repent. It is interesting to note how many things in the book of Revelation occur in sevens. The word to repent occurs 7 times in these two chapters. Six times in the imperative and once in the indicative, 'She repented not.' Repentance occurs four more times after chapter three, and all four times it says this: and they repented not or neither did they repent. We are soberly reminded that there comes a time when it is too late to repent.

The verse then goes on, "Therefore if you will not watch..." How long does it take to become complacent when things are going well? Not long at all. How do you like circumstances in life that cast you on the Lord again and again? How do you like it when you hardly know where to turn and one thing upon another comes so that you are just afraid of hearing one more thing? But if the Lord sends us things to wake us up in time to keep us from getting too comfortable in the cockpit, we are indebted to Him.

Our verse goes on: *Therefore if you will not watch I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* Now what city, other than Sardis, would know more about growing complacent, and waking up after the thief had already entered and there was only one thing left to do, and that is to throw up their hands? It had happened more than once. You see the city should have set a guard every day and every night. But so secure was their position that they slept soundly without a guard, though the enemy was encamped around them.

Now the words, "I will come on you as a thief..." refers neither to the Day of the Lord coming as a thief, nor to Christ's coming for the believer at an unexpected time. This is a warning addressed specifically to the church in Sardis as the counsel to the other churches is addressed to them. But though this peril is addressed to only one of the seven churches, it is a danger of every believer and every church. It is my danger and it is your danger.

J.B. Smith says of this warning: "Cyrus came upon Sardis 'as a thief in the night' and conquered the city before the inhabitants had time 'to put on their boots' simply because there was no one watching at the right time and place."

The Lord's warning to this church and to each one of us is clear in these words, *Therefore if you will not watch I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* Just like the city of Sardis had no idea someone had arrived to take over, so this church, if they did not wake up would experience the same fate. What a warning is here.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, what is the major warning to Sardis, that impregnable fortress. Watch! Their danger lay in their security, their strong point. If the airplane pilot had not been slouching and his eyes had had the visibility the instructions recommended, he might have saved two plane loads of people.

Now take our spiritual lives. Just a little slouching, a moment of not watching, and it can have disastrous consequences. And Sardis teaches us this lesson: You can never afford to relax or slouch or sleep.

So we are left with five imperatives: Watch! Strengthen the things that remain. Remember where you came from than hold fast and then repent of where you have strayed. If we do not watch, the Lord Himself will come on us as a thief. He will come on us totally unexpected. It happens when one is totally unaware. Jesus said it like this: And what I say to you I say to all: Watch!"