

October 16, 2022

Sunnyside Community Church

Pastor Guy Shields

***“The Risen Christ’s Address to His Church- Pt.6: To the Church in Sardis—Christ Calls His church to wake up to her compromising accommodation to the surrounding society”- Pt.1~ Rev.3:1-6***

---

**Introduction:**

—I invite you—

—this morning—

—to turn—with me—

—to Revelation 3—

**—In our journey—**

—through this circuit—

—of churches—

—we come—

—this morning—

—to the 5<sup>th</sup> church—

—along the way—

—the church—

—in Sardis—

**—According to the structure—**

—of the seven churches—

—that we laid out—

—at the beginning—

—Sardis—is—the third church—  
—in that group—identified—  
—as the Tempted church—

—And—

—of these—three—

—tempted—

—churches—

—Sardis—is—the one—

—in greatest—

—decline—

—Sardis—

—is—the lifeless—

—church—

—Sardis—

—is—the slumbering—

—church—

—Sardis—is—the church—

—the compromising—church—

—The Sardian church—

—to which Christ speaks—

—is a church—

—significantly—

—given over—

—to accommodation—

—to the surrounding—

—pagan—society—

—A church—

—significantly given in—

—to compromise—

—with the culture—

—As such—

—the Sardian church—receives—

—a stern warning—

—from the Risen Christ—

—But—

—she—also—receives—

—strong encouragement—

—from the Risen Christ—

—In spite—

—of her—serious compromise—

—she is not—simply—

—given up—

—The prospect—

—of overcoming—yet—remains—

—The possibility—

—of conquering—

—is—still—real—

—And so—

—the word of Christ—to her—

—is—both—

—stern rebuke—

—and—

—strong reassurance—

—As with each—

—of the messages—

—there is much—in this message—

—that is relevant—

—to us—

—today—

—There is much—

—food—

—for thought—

—There is a good deal—

—to take—

—to heart—

—Now—

—again—

—as we delve—

—into this message—

—to Sardis—

—we will approach it—

—much as we have—

—the previous four—

—But—

—as a broad—framework—

—I want to set up—

—our considerations—

—under three headings—

—We will consider—

**I. The Summation of the Message**

**II. The Setting of the Message**

**III. The Substance of the Message**

—The first—two—

—we will take—

—this morning—

—And—the third—

—we will take up—next week—

—This morning—

—I want to simply give—

—a summation of this message—

—to the Sardian church—

—This will not be—

—a full exposition—

—of the message—

—but rather—

—a distilled—summary—

—of the basic point—

—that the Risen Christ—is making—  
—in his message—

—The lion share—

—of our time—we will give—

—to the setting—

—for this Message—

—We will examine—three aspects—

—of that setting—

1) the geographical setting—

2) the historical setting—

—and—

3) the contemporary setting—

—into which Christ speaks—

—Now—

—it is important—

—for us—

—to take the time—

—to understand—

—the setting for these messages—

—because—

—it helps us—

—to get a feel—

—for the situation—

—that Christ is  
addressing—

—and—

—it helps—

—to shed light—

—on many elements—

—within the  
message—itself—

—Many of the images—

—and—

—even—

—the whole orientation—

—of the message—

—becomes clearer—

—when we  
understand—

—the situation—

—into which—

—the Risen Christ—is—speaking—

—(Now—I realize—that this extends—the time—we take—  
considering—these messages—to the churches—

—But—the extended time—pays dividends—in our understanding—  
not only—of the messages—themselves—but also—of the entire—  
Epistle)—

—When we come—to the third—broad—heading—

—(the Substance of the Message)—

—we will—break it out—

—as we have—

—the others—

—we will consider—

1. The Address
2. The Affirmation
3. The Assessment
4. The Assignment

—and

5. The Assurance—

—of the Message—

—So—

—with that—introductory—

—explanation—

—let's read—

—the message—

—and—then—

—consider—

—a summary of the message—

—and—

—the setting for the message—

**—Revelation 3:1-6—** *“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. 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. 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. 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. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

Trans—First of all—

—then—

## I. The Summation of the Message to Sardis

—In a nutshell—

—the message—of the Risen Christ—

—to the church—in Sardis—

—is—this—

If the church is to be ready to meet Christ at His appearing and worthy to march with Him in His triumph over the nations that rage against Him, then she must vigilantly watch out for compromising accommodation with the ever-encroaching world in the midst of which she is situated.

—Now—

—there are—basically—

—four points—to be made—

—from this summary—

1. **The church is situated in the midst of the world**
2. **The world is ever encroaching upon the church**
3. **The church must be watchful of compromising accommodation with this worldly encroachment**
4. **By this watchfulness the church will be ready to meet Christ and worthy to march with Him in his triumph over the raging nations**

—As we have talked—

—before—

—the church—*dwells*—

—in the world—

—Although we are—

—*aliens/ strangers/ sojourners*—

—at present—

—we are—also—

—*dwellers*—

—in the city—

—Now—

—the city—

—in which we dwell—

—is—continuously—

—pressing—in—

—upon us—

—Whether it be—

—intentionally—endeavoring—

—to influence—the church—

—or—simply—

—advancing its own interests—

—in unbounded—

—pursuit—

—the world—is—ever—

—encroaching/pressing—

—upon the church—

—The ways—of the world—

—are—ever—knocking—

—on the door—

—of the church—

**—This—pressure/ encroaching—**

—of the world—

—is—something—

—of a—

—push-me—

—pull-me—

—affair—

—It is a—

**—pull-me—affair—**

—in the sense—

—that—

—the interests—of the world—

—are—attractive—

—to our flesh—

—the interests—of the world—

—entice us—

—to participate—

—with them—

—But—

—on the other hand—

—It is a—push-me—affair—

—in the sense—

—of the world’s opposition—

—to our faithfulness—

—to Christ—

—crowding—us—

—into compromise—

—Both—of these aspects

—are—a reality—

—for the church—

—in the world—

—In view of this—

—the church’s concern—

—is—to be watchful—

—the church—must be—watchful—

—of compromising-accommodation—

—compromising—accommodation—

—to either—

—of these two—effects—

—of the world’s encroachment—

—Compromising—accommodation—

—to worldly attractions—

—to the flesh—  
—Compromising—accommodation—  
—to worldly aversions—  
—to the truth—  
—The church’s watchfulness—  
—in this situation—  
—is—essential—  
—for readiness—  
—to meet Christ—  
—at his appearing—  
—At his return—  
—Christ will—  
—both—  
—descend—in triumph—  
—over the nations—  
—that rage—  
—against Him—  
—and—  
—sit—  
—in assessment—  
—of his servants—  
—Respecting—this second aspect—of Christ’s return—  
—the Risen Christ—declares—  
—in Revelation 22:12

**—Revelation 22:12—*"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."***

- The Lord Jesus—spoke—
  - of this aspect—
    - His return—
      - during his earthly ministry—
  - You remember—
    - the parable—
      - of the talents—
- Watchfulness—
  - of the world's encroachment—
    - is—essential—
      - for readiness—
        - for this assessment—
- But—
  - watchfulness—
    - is not only—necessary—
      - to readiness—
        - for this assessment—
  - It is also—necessary—
    - to worthiness—
      - to participate—with Christ—
        - when he comes—in triumph—
          - over the nations—
            - that rage—

—against Him—

—Christ makes this point—

—explicitly—

—in this message—

—to Sardis—

—(we will see this—when we deal—with the message—in detail)

—And—so—

—if we would be—

—ready—

—to meet Christ—

—at his appearing—

—and—

—worthy—

—to march—with Him—

—in his triumph—

—then—

—we must be—

—watchful—

—We must be—

—vigilant—

—in our watchfulness—

—vigilant—

—in our watchfulness—

—of the—

—push-me—

—pull-me—

—affair—

—of the world's—

—encroaching—

— advance—

—Now—

—we will look—

—at these things—

—more—closely—

—as we work our way—

—through—the message—

—But—

—I simply—set—

—this summary—before us—

—as a preparation—

—for those considerations—

—and—even—

—for our reflection—

—this morning—

**Trans—So—**

—there we have—

—the Summation—of the Message—

—Now—

—let's look—

—at—the—Setting—

—of the Message—

—Let's consider—

—the Sardis—

—to which—

—the Risen Christ—addresses—

—this message—

## II. The Setting of the Message to Sardis

—We will consider—

—three facets—

—of the setting—

**A. The Geographical Setting**

**B. The Historical Setting**

**C. The Contemporary Setting**

—First of all—

### A. The Geographical Setting

—As I already mentioned—

—Sardis—

—was—the 5<sup>th</sup> church—

—on this circuit—

—of seven churches—

—Sardis—

—was—down the road—

—about 30-40 miles—

—south—of Thyatira—

—About 50 miles—

—east—

—of Ephesus—

—Sardis—

—was—located—

—on the south edge—

—of the Hermus River valley—

—The city—

—sat—

—on a spur—

—extending out—

—from the northern slope—

—of Mt. Tmolus—

—Mt. Tmolus—was—a peak—

—that rose—

—7000ft. above the floor—

—of the Hermus valley—

—The spur—

—on which—

—the original city—was built—

—rose—1500ft—

—above the valley—

—The plateau—

—on which the city—sat—

—**was small**—

—It was only able—

—to accommodate—

—a modest—

—population—

—The sides—

—of the spur

—were— essentially—

—**perpendicular**—

—A 1500ft—

—sheer—wall face—

—that was—

—virtually—impossible—

—to ascend—

—This made—the plateau—

—virtually—

—unassailable—

—The city—

—was—easy to defend—

—It—was like—a watch-tower—

—from which—one could overlook—

—the entire—

—Hermus valley—

—These—

—precipice walls—

—formed—three sides—

—of the spur—

—The west—

—the north—

—and—

—the east—

—On the south—

—(the side—extending out—from Mt. Tmolus)—

—provided—the only—

—“ready”—

—access—

—to the plateau—

—A winding road—

—worked its way—

—back and forth—

—up the slope—

—to the city gates—

—Now—

—because the plateau—

—was—small—

—because—it was only able—to accommodate—

—a very limited population—

—as—the population—grew—  
    —a second city—developed—  
        —at the base—  
            —of the spur—  
—mostly—  
    —on the west—  
        —and the north—  
—The name—  
    —Sardis—  
        —is—actually—  
            —plural—  
—This is—because—  
    —there were—actually—  
        —two—cities—  
    —the upper—  
        —Sardis—  
—and—  
    —the lower—  
        —Sardis—  
—To the West—  
    —of the lower city—  
—Coming down—  
    —out of Mt. Tmolus—  
        —there was—

—a small river—

—called—

—the Pactolus—

—In the early life—

—of the city—

—gold dust—

—was—gleaned—

—out of the sands—

—of the Pactolus—

—Sardis—

—was the first—city—

—to mint—gold—

—and—silver—coins<sup>1</sup>—

—The city—

—accumulated—great wealth—

—from commerce—

—and—trade—

—In fact—

—its wealth—was—legendary—

—and—proverbial—

—The name—

—of the greatest—

—of the Sardinian kings—

---

<sup>1</sup> Osborne, p.171

—lives on—

—in the proverb—

—*"As rich—as—Croesus"*—

—Some distance—

—away—to the north—

—was—

—a necropolis—

—A mountain—

—pocked—

—with hundreds of caves—

—These caves—

—were used—

—as tombs—

—The people of Sardis—

—had a special interest—

—in death—

—and—immortality—

—Their religious life—

—was—largely—focused—

—on nature—

—on the fertility cycle—

—and—

—on bring life—

—out of death<sup>2</sup>—

—I need to mention—

—that the pillar/ spur—

—on which—the original city—was built—

—was formed—

—of a—very—crumbly—material—

—It was—not—

—rock—

—but rather—

—a coarse—

—friable—

—mixture—

—of hard-packed earth—

—that would crumble—

—very easily—

**Trans**—This—

—then—

—is the geographical—setting—

—of Sardis—

—We move—

—now—

—to consider—

## **B. The Historical Setting**

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, p.172

—It is—generally—understood—  
—that the city—of Sardis—  
—had its beginnings—  
—in the 12<sup>th</sup> century—B.C.—  
—with the emergence—  
—of the Lydian Kingdom—  
—The history—  
—of this kingdom—  
—was marked—  
—by wars—  
—And so—  
—it is not difficult—  
—to understand—  
—how a place—like Sardis—  
—would become—  
—a gathering place—  
—for the population—  
—even—  
—a leading center—  
—and—  
—administrative base—  
—for the Kingdom—  
—As the administrative seat—  
—of the Lydian kingdom—

—Sardis—dominated—  
—the region—  
—From this acropolis—  
—the Lydian Kings—  
—rules—  
—and—  
—the Lydian armies—  
—fended off—  
—the assaults—  
—of the surrounding—  
—peoples—  
—from the east—  
—as well as—  
—from the west—  
—Because of its dominance—  
—Sardis was considered—  
—by the Greeks—  
—to be—  
—one of the greatest—  
—of all cities—  
—Sardis—  
—was easy to defend—  
—The precipice walls—  
—made the plateau—

—virtually—

—impregnable—

—The only area—

—that required—defense—

—was the southern side—

—But even this—

—was not easily—breached—

—because—of the steepness—

—of the access—

—This—

—*seeming*—

—almost complete—

—unassailability—

—engendered—

—a great deal—

—of confidence—

—in the people—

—but—

—it also fostered—

—a laxity/ a lack of vigilance/ watchfulness—

—This—

—over—

—confidence—

—and—lack of watchfulness—

—would play—

—a significant role—

—in the downfall—

—of the city—

—and—

—of the kingdom—

—The Lydian Kingdom—

—ruled—the region—

—from the 12<sup>th</sup> century—

—to 6<sup>th</sup> century—

—In 546 B.C.—

—Croesus—

—(the most famous—

—of the Lydian kings)—

—confidently—set out—

—to confront—

—Cyrus—

—king of Persian—

—whose armies—

—were advancing—

—from the east—

—Croesus—

—was—emboldened—

—by the impregnable nature—

—of his stronghold—  
—and by—  
—the Oracle of Delphi—  
—which he had consulted—  
—in advance—  
—of his endeavor—  
—In response—to His inquiry—  
—of the Oracle—  
—Croesus was told—  
— *“If you cross the River Halys—  
—you will destroy—  
—a great empire.”—*  
—Croesus—took this—  
—as a guarantee—  
—of his success—  
—However—  
—when the two armies—collided—  
—Croesus—  
—and—his forces—  
—were—  
—soundly—beaten—  
—Croesus retreated—  
—to his mountain fortress—  
—He expected—

—to withstand—

—Cyrus' advance—

—and—

—eventually—

—triumph—

—The Persians—

—laid siege—

—to the city—

—It lasted—

—only 14 days—

—The Lydian stronghold—

—was—breached—

—and—

—the Kingdom—

—was brought—

—to its knees—

—William Barclay—

—records the account—

—this way—

*—"During the siege, (One of Cyrus's soldiers) happen to observe a Sardian soldier accidentally drop his helmet over the battlements of the fortress. The soldier subsequently made his way down the precipice to retrieve it. The observing soldier understood from this that there must be a fissure in the rock; a crack or gap by which this soldier was able to descend. If it was possible to come down then it just might be possible for an agile man to climb up.*

*That night this soldier led a party of Persian troops up by the fault in the face of the cliff. When they reached the top, they found the battlements completely unguarded. Like a thief—the Persian soldiers—slipped over the walls, fell upon the unsuspecting Sardians—and overthrew the city.”*

—The great kingdom—

—that Croesus—destroyed—

—was—his own—

—The overthrow—

—of Sardis—

—reverberated—

—like shock waves—

—throughout the region—

—No one—

—had ever expected—

—that this formidable stronghold—

—would be—

—overthrown—

—For the next 300 years—

—Sardis—was held—

—by the Persians—

—In 499 B.C.—

—the lower city—was—burned—

—in an audacious assault—

—by the Ionians—

—In 334 B.C.—

—the city was surrendered—  
    —to the advancing—Alexander the Great—  
        —without a fight—  
—Alexander—  
    —gave Sardis—  
        —its freedom—  
    —but—  
        —this—  
            —didn't last long—  
—Sardis—  
    —would—subsequently—be ruled—  
        —by other powers—  
            —including—Antiochus III—  
                —(one of the rulers—of the Seleucid empire—that took  
                over a vast region—of the Empire—of Alexander—after  
                his death)—  
—In 224 B.C.—  
    —Antiochus captured—Sardis—  
        —by a virtual repeat—  
            —of what had happened—  
                —with Cyrus—  
—This time—  
    —a Cretan soldier—  
        —named—Lagoras—  
            —together with fifteen soldiers—

—climbed—the cliff—

—at an unguarded spot—

—and—opened the gates—

—to the city—

—Eventually—

—with the rise—of Roman power—

—Sardis came under the rule—

—of the Pergamean Kingdom—

—and then—finally—

—in 133 B.C.—

—under the direct rule—

—of the Romans

—After the—so-called—Roman Peace—

—brought stability—

—to the region—

—the significance—of Sardis—

—was greatly—diminished—

—such a military citadel—

—was—no longer—needed—

—However—

—it continued—

—to be—

—a major center—

—of trade—

—Its location—

—on the major roads—

—to the east—

—as well as—

—to Smyrna—

—and—Pergamum—

—made it—strategic—

—Sardis—

—was a major center—

—of woolen works—

—Sardis—boasted—itself—

—as the birthplace—

—of woolen dying—

—The significance—

—of Sardis—

—as a trade center—

—is—illustrated—

—by the measures—

—taken—by Tiberius Caesar—

—following—

—the earthquake—

—of AD 17—

—In AD 17—

—a horrendous earthquake—

—shock the region—

—Pliny—

—the Roman naturalist-philosopher—

—declared it—

—the worst disaster—

—in human memory—

—Sardis—

—was hardest hit—

—Tacitus—

—the Roman historian—

—recorded it—this way—

*—“The same year, twelve important cities of Asia collapsed in an earthquake during the night, so that the devastation was all the more unexpected and crushing. . . The disaster was harshest to the citizens of Sardis, and brought them the largest share of pity.”*

—Sardis—

—was devastated—

—by the earthquake—

—It may even be—

—that portions—

—of the spur—

—actually—

—collapsed—

—To aid—the city’s recovery—

—Tiberius Caesar—made—massive—donations—to the city—

—Tacitus continues—

—*Tiberius promised them ten million sesterces (something like \$500,000.00) and remitted for five years whatever they used to pay to the public exchequer or his privy purse*

—In gratitude—

**—the city struck a coin—**

—in Tiberius' honor—

—In AD 26—

—Sardis appealed—for the privilege—

—of raising a temple—

—in honor—

—of the Caesar—

—However—

—the privilege—

—was awarded—

—to Smyrna—

—instead—

—Religiously—

—Sardis—

—was—typically—

—pagan—

—The Patron goddess—

—was the goddess—

—Cybele/ Artemis—

**—portions—**

—of a temple—

—of this goddess—

—remain—

—in Sardis—

—it rivaled—

—the one—built for Artemis—

—in Ephesus—

—It seems—

—that there was—a large—

—Jewish—population—

—in Sardis—

—Antiochus III—settled—

—some—

—2000 Jews—

—in the city—

—And—

—it is believed—

—by some—

—that they—were—actually—given—

—Roman citizenship—

—Josephus—

—(the Jewish historian)—

—speaks—of a large—

—wealthy—

—Jewish community—

—Very possibly drawn—

—to Sardis—

—by its significant—

—trading industry—

**—One of the largest—**

—synagogues—ever—unexcavated—

—has been discovered—

—at Sardis—

—What is remarkable—

—about this synagogue—

—(besides its size)—

—is—

—its location—

—in the city—

—and—

—its—proximity—

—to Greek gymnasium—

—The synagogue—

—is located—

—in a focal point—

—in the city—

—and—

—the gymnasium—

—actually—forms—  
—part—  
—of the synagogue structure—  
—These two factors—  
—seem to indicate—  
—that there was a good deal—  
—of accommodation to—  
—and—even—  
—a syncretistic merging—  
—of the Jewish community—  
—with the pagan—Greek—society—  
—It is important—to note—  
—that—  
—in the Greek world—  
—of that day—  
—a gymnasium—  
—was not—just—  
—a facility—  
—for physical training—  
—A gymnasium—  
—was a center—  
—of education—  
—It was—a place—  
—of learning—

- a place—
  - of training—
    - in Hellenistic/ Greek culture—
- That this synagogue—
  - includes—a gymnasium—
    - in its structure—
      - indicates—
        - that there was—
          - significant—
            - accommodation to/ syncretism with—
              - Greek society—
                - by the Jewish community—

**Trans**—This brings us—

- to a brief—consideration—
  - of our final point—

### C. The Contemporary Setting

- (The setting—in the Sardis—addressed—by the Risen Christ)—
- It appears—
  - from the message—
    - to Sardis—
      - that the church/ Christian community—
        - has—
          - itself—

—engaged—

—in the syncretism—

—evident—

—in the Jewish  
community—

—It seems—

—that the church in Sardis—

—is enmeshed—

—in compromising—accommodation—

—with the society—

—in which it dwells—

—It seems—

—also—

—that they are facing—opposition/pressure—

—from the Jewish—community—

—opposition/ pressure—

—to draw back—

—from their faithfulness—

—to Christ—

—pressure—

—to withhold—

—their confession—

—of Christ—

—During this early period—

—of the church—

—the church enjoyed—

—a measure—of protection—

—from Roman/civil hostility—

—by her—identification/association—

—with the Jews—

—The Jews were accorded—

—special—measures/ liberties—

—by the Civil authorities—

—And—

—at least for a time—

—these civil authorities—considered—

—the Christians/ followers of the way—

—to be—a sect—

—of the Jews—

—from this—

—the church—enjoyed—

—a measure of protected—

—In this case—

—if the Christians/church—

—should—lose—

—their identity—

—with the Jews—

—they would be—fully exposed—

—to the antagonism—

—of the civil authorities—

—And—

—it is not—unreasonable—

—that the Jews—

—(who opposed—their confession—of Jesus—as Messiah)—

—would use this—

—as a leverage—

—with the Christians—

—that they—would put pressure—

—on the Christians—

—*not*—

—to confess—Jesus—

—as Lord—

—but—

—to join—with them—

—in their acquiescence/ accommodation—

—with the pagan society—

—it seems—

—from this message—to Sardis—

—that this is part—

—of what is happening—

—in Sardis—

—So then—

—there are two concerns—

—in the church—

—in Sardis—

1) The concern—over syncretism—

—in which—the church—

—is making—

—compromising—accommodation—

—with the pagan society—

—around them—

—and—

2) The concern—over the pressure—

—being brought on them—

—by a coercive—

—Jewish—

—community—

—It is—

—to a church—

—pinched—

—between these two concerns—

—that the Risen speaks—

## **Conclusion**

—So—

—the stage is set—

—to delve—

—into this word—

—of the Risen Christ—

—to this—

—Tempted—

—lifeless—

—church—

—Again—

—in a nutshell—

—Christ's word—is this—

If the church is to be ready to meet Christ at His appearing and worthy to march with Him in His triumph over the nations that rage against Him, then she must vigilantly watch out for compromising accommodation with the ever-encroaching world in the midst of which she is situated.