

Text: Rev. 3:1-6

Title: "The Son of Man's local church at Sardis"

Time: 4/23/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - In 1897 Great Britain was celebrating the 60th anniversary of the reign of Queen Victoria. There was much boastful celebration in the press about the glory of the British empire of those days. On that occasion Rudyard Kipling published in the London *Times* a poem he called "Recessional." A recessional is a hymn that an Anglican congregation sings as the clergy and choir leave a church at the end of a service. Kipling's poem was a prayer for his country in all its pomp and pride, which reflected great spiritual insights:

God of our fathers, known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,  
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine —  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget — lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The Captains and the Kings depart:  
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget — lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
On dune and headland sinks the fire:  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,

Lest we forget – lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose  
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,  
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,  
Or lesser breeds without the Law –  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust  
In reeking tube and iron shard,  
All valiant dust that builds on dust,  
And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,  
For frantic boast and foolish word –  
Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

Today Great Britain can no longer make the grand boasts that her empire made in the days of Queen Victoria. Kipling saw that demise coming in the pride of his nation and their forgetfulness of the God of their fathers.

Sardis had known a similar history. Kipling referred to the fall of Nineveh in his poem, when the Assyrian Empire was destroyed. Lydia was one of the great empires that arose from those ashes and Sardis was Lydia's capital in those days. The Lydians were famous in history for their King Croesus, whose wealth was legendary. That name is still a synonym for a wealthy man. This city had a name that was once great, but by the time the Son of Man's local church in Sardis received this letter, that greatness was only a distant memory.

As we read about this church's condition, we see parallels between the city's history and that of its local church. In both cases, a former greatness had given way to current de-

cay. Our study of the Son of Man's letter to His local church will have four points again: (1) His glory in the church; (2) His correction of the church; (3) His encouragement of the church; and (4) His reward for the church. This week's message will cover only the first of these.

### I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (v. 1a).

Ill: A couple of Wednesdays ago, we came out of prayer meeting and the parking lot was unusually dark. Normally, I put the modular lights on prior to the service, but with the longer daylight I did not do that this time. When I came out of the building I heard Brother David exclaim, "Look at the stars!" Now on those days that I remembered to turn the modular lights on, I never heard David say, "Look at those lightbulbs!" Although both give off light, the stars have a magnificent glory that the light bulbs do not.

Appl: Stars are mentioned in this letter again as part of the Son of Man's glory in the local church. There are seven of them, and we know them to be the angels of the seven churches (1:20). We also know from that verse that the seven churches are represented by seven lampstands.

When we studied that passage, I made the point that every letter to every church is really a letter to the church's angel, always in the second person singular. From that I concluded that the angel is the local church, a messenger of gospel light viewed from heaven as a star. Whereas we can only see a local church like our own to be a simple lampstand, in Jesus's hand it has the light of a star and so is a great angel or messenger of God's truth. Jesus sees our lampstands as His stars. That is part of His glory in the local church. That glory, and only that glory, is truly what makes membership in a local church like ours worthwhile.

Appl2: There is a second aspect to the glory of the Son of Man in the local church mentioned in our verse, and I believe that it is the force that makes local-church lampstands Jesus's stars - the seven spirits of God. That is a symbol for the Holy Spirit that comes from the book of Zechariah in the Old Testament.

From Revelation we know that these seven spirits are lamps before God's throne (Rev. 1:4, 4:5), and that they are also the eyes of the Lamb sent out into all the earth (Rev. 5:6). Those lamps and eyes are symbols of two ministries of the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world to do two things: (1) to lead His people into all the truth, and (2) to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come (John 16:7-15). He is (1) our source of truth, the lamps before God's throne, and (2) the power of conviction in the world, the eyes of the Lamb gone out into all the earth.

Now because much of this symbolism of the Holy Spirit comes from Zechariah, which is a prophecy about the Israelites rebuilding the temple, we can learn much about the role of the Holy Spirit in our local church from their experience. Notice with me two things in this regard.

1. The Holy Spirit brought the saving power of Christ to bear on sin (Zech. 3:1-10).

Appl: Joshua, one of the leaders of the temple rebuild project, is a sinner made righteous in this passage. The key to that change is a stone the Lord lays before Joshua (v. 9). Jesus Christ is the Stone laid before Joshua, which enabled the exchange of his filthy garments for clothes of white and a fair mitre (Zech. 3:4; Psalm 118:21-26; Acts 4:11-12, "This [the crucified and risen Christ] is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the

corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”).

And notice that Joshua’s Stone has seven eyes engraved upon it. The seven eyes of Yahweh are the same seven eyes of the Lamb, which symbolize the Holy Spirit’s power of conviction that is gone out into all the world. Not only did Jesus die for our sins; He also sent the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. He calls sinners to repentance and saving faith. Has he done so for you? Have you been saved from your iniquity like Joshua?

2. The Holy Spirit brought the service power of Christ to bear on ministry (Zech. 4:1-10).

Ill: Joshua and Zerubbabel were called of God to rebuild from its ruins the temple of God in preparation for the coming Stone or Branch. Without their work the ministry of Christ in perfect fulfillment of the law of God could not have happened, because fulfilling much of that law required having a temple and its forms of worship. They are the two anointed with oil, the olive trees whose Holy-Spirit-filled lives then flow into the temple project, which then becomes a Spirit-endowed light of God’s truth. We should have the same effect on our local church, a lampstand of a different kind for our day.

Appl: Two very practical impediments had to be overcome for this great temple rebuild work to be accomplished through these men.

First, they had to determine not to despise the day of small things (4:10).

Appl: The work these men were trying to accomplish was insignificant in the world's eyes. The smallness of the work was a potential source of great discouragement (as it was when Tobiah the Ammonite mocked the work of Nehemiah in Neh. 4:1-3). This was undoubtedly also true for a local church like the one in Sardis.

But when we understand that the eyes of the Lord are upon a work in the person of the Holy Spirit, its size does not matter. He can save by many or by few. Remember what Jonathan told his young armor bearer when faced with the Philistine enemy: "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armor, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). Let's determine that the small-thingness of our work will never be something we despise or let discourage us from the task God has given to us. Jesus's eyes are upon us, and His Spirit can do the work of a very big star with a very small lampstand.

Second, they had to stop trying to do the work in their own strength (4:6-9).

Ill: One of the things that Jesus mentions as he corrects the church at Sardis is that He had not found their works perfect or completed before God (Rev. 3:2). There was more to do, and that more to do was in danger of not getting done. They were tempted to quit.

Appl: Here in Zechariah's time, God promises that the hands of Zerubbabel, which laid the foundation of the temple work, would also finish that work (v. 9). How would that happen? Not by man's might, not by man's power, but

by the might and power of the Holy Spirit of the Lord of hosts (v. 6).

It is significant that He is here the Spirit of the Lord of *hosts*. Hosts are armies. Building the temple was more than anything else a huge spiritual battle against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Building New Boston Baptist Church is the same kind of spiritual battle. The more we try to do that work in our own power and might, neglecting times of prayer and Scripture-reading and worship of Christ, the more our work is going to fail. We have a job that we have started and need to complete, and we need to hear the Lord calling us to our daily times of communion with Him with the words, "'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' saith the Lord."

Conclusion to part 1: This is the glory of the Son of Man in our church. He makes lampstands give off light as powerful as the stars of heaven, and He does so through the work of His Holy Spirit in our lives. How is your personal relationship with the Holy Spirit? He is holy, and we often grieve Him with unconfessed sin and unforsaken idols. He is powerful, but He does not force Himself upon us, and we can often quench the flame of His work in and through us by walking in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

Are you walking in the Spirit or in the flesh this morning? If in the Spirit, you know how to answer the question, "Who has despised the day of small things?" Your answer is, "Not I." "Not I, because the seven spirits make the seven lampstands the seven stars." The Holy Spirit makes our local church His mighty angel. "'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' saith the Lord of Hosts." Let's rely on Him.

- II. The Son of Man's correction of the church (vv. 1b-3).
- III. The Son of Man's encouragement of the church (v. 4).
- IV. The Son of Man's reward for the church (vv. 5-6).

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*