

Text: Rev. 3:1-6

Title: "The Son of Man's local church at Sardis" – Part 2

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 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 decay. 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.

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

See Part 1.

II. The Son of Man's correction of the church (vv. 1b-3).

III: The town of Sardis had a great name due to its history, and yet it was now a mere shell of its former glory. Jesus says the same thing about His local church in Sardis – they had a name that they were alive, but they were actually dead, and this is what He desires to correct in them. The name that they had had come from former days of glory and God's blessing. Those days were gone now.

Every town in New England has at its town center a building that reminds its residents of what that is like – a place with a glorious history and a vaunted name, but tragic spiritual deadness today. The deadness of the local church in Sardis exhibited itself in two ways in this local church:

1. Their deadness was characterized by sleepy apathy (v. 2a, 3b).

Appl: The Lord Jesus essentially tells this church that they need to wake up out of a deadly sleep. They just did not care anymore.

III: In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian loses the heavy burden on his back when he comes to the cross and finds forgiveness for his sins. After that wonderful experience, he continues on his journey, and the first thing he encounters are three men chained and sleeping on the way.

Their names are Simple, Sloth, and Presumption. Bunyan writes:

“Christian, then, seeing them lie in this case, went to them, if peradventure he might awake them, and cried, ‘You are like them that sleep on the top of a mast’; for the deep sea is under you, a gulf that hath no bottom: awake, therefore, and come away; be willing, also, and I will help you off with your irons.’ He also told them, ‘If he that goeth about like a roaring lion comes by, you will certainly become a prey to his teeth.’ With that they looked upon him, and began to reply in this sort: Simple said, ‘I see no danger’; Sloth said, ‘Yet a little more sleep’; and Presumption said, ‘Every tub must stand upon its own bottom’ [i.e., ‘mind your own business’]. And so they lay down to sleep again, and Christian went on his way.

“Yet was he troubled to think, that men in that danger should so little esteem the kindness of him that so freely offered to help them, both by awakening of them, counselling of them, and proffering to help them off with their irons.”

Appl: Not much has changed since the days of Sardis nor since the days of Bunyan when it comes to the problem of sleepy apathy in the local church. I think Bunyan had great insight making this the first problem Christian encounters as a new believer. How discouraging it is to babes in Christ to find their older brothers and sisters asleep with apathy in the work of the Lord! If we just do not care about the work we are called to do, we may have a name that we are alive, but we are as good as dead.

Do you care about the work of New Boston Baptist Church? Are you awakened unto the cause of the Son of Man and the work of His local church? If not, Jesus says, “Wake up!” And then He warns that if we fail to wake up in this way,

we shall in no way be ready for His coming (3b). That is an emphatic negative. The most important day in our eternal existence will be the day that Jesus comes back to reward every man according to what he has done (Rom. 2:6). We do not want to fail to be ready for that day. Away with deadness characterized by sleepy apathy. May we be enthusiastically alive in the work God has called us to do.

2. Their deadness was characterized by unfinished work (v. 2b-3a).

Ill: You may remember from last week what we read in Zechariah 4 about Joshua and Zerubbabel and God's people who needed God's Spirit in order to finish the work they had begun (v. 9): "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."

That passage was a great encouragement to me in school, because when I enrolled this last time as a 40-something-year-old with a wife and three children, I was concerned about whether I would be able to finish what God had called me to start. I put verses 6-7 on the desktop of my computer as a promise I would claim to get through school, "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, 'This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," saith the Lord of hosts.' Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, 'Grace, grace unto it.'" I read that verse many times in need of encouragement to finish the job.

Appl: Since then God has given me the task of being a member of this local church. That work is not yet complete.

It is in many ways more intimidating and overwhelming than was the task of going to school. But I still have a verse on my desktop to help me not quit. It is Acts 20:24, where Paul says, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."

The Savior is concerned that we finish the work He asks us to begin. He does not say that we have to go fast. He says we have to finish. He does not say that our work has to be vast and glorious, but it has to be complete. He mentions that the key to finishing is understanding how to strengthen the things that are still alive, the things that have not yet quit (v. 2a). The task of strengthening what remains alive in our church is done by remembering how we received and heard (not just what), and repenting of our temptation to quit.

III: This past week Pastor David Mook from Phoenix encouraged the men of the ACCC from Galatians 6, where Paul encourages a troubled church to keep on sowing unto the Spirit rather than unto the flesh with the promise, "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Perhaps the Son of Man's correction of this church is the correction we need, because we are tempted to be weary and faint, because we no longer believe the promise, "In due season we shall reap." If so, we must remember how we have heard and received our calling, and repent.

III. The Son of Man's encouragement of the church (v. 4).

Appl: The encouragement is for a faithful few. They are called *a few names* because that was the NT way to say *a few church members*. When the first local church was born in Jerusalem, Acts tells us that the number of names was 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). Then the Lord added to the number of names in the church daily those who were being saved and baptized.

Here in Sardis they were likely fewer than 120, let alone than the thousands in Jerusalem who were later added. Jesus wants to encourage these few names, these few church members. They have not defiled their garments with the sleepy apathy and weak unfinished work of the majority. They still cared, and they had not yet quit. He says, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." They are worthy, not only to be clothed in the garments (v. 5), but also to walk with the King in them. Every unworthy sinner who overcomes sin by faith will be clothed in white garments, but the faithful few names will walk with the King in them in a way not every believer will be able to enjoy in the kingdom. Would you be worthy to walk so with the King? Keep your garments undefiled by apathy and unfinished work.

#### IV. The Son of Man's reward for the church (vv. 5-6).

Appl: John teaches us elsewhere that those who are born again by faith overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5): "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for your sins on Calvary and who rose again from the dead? If so, you shall be clothed in white raiment, your name will remain in the Book of Life,

and your name will be confessed by Christ before God the Father and His holy angels.

Conclusion: If not, you will be found without wedding clothes and cast out. Your name will be blotted out from the Book of Life. And Jesus will someday say, "Depart from Me, you cursed of my Father, I never knew you." Now He says, "Let him who has ears hear!" He wants you to hear.

"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*