

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #9
Revelation 3:1-6
9/06 /2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Sardis

CHRIST'S FAITHFUL REMNANT

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” Throughout the Bible we find very few times when the people, as a whole, were faithful, but we do find a pattern of God's faithful remnant. It may have been just a handful of people, such as during the time of Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal, but God has never been without His faithful remnant.

During the time of church history represented by the church at Sardis there were men such as Luther, Calvin, Wesley, etc. They were most certainly a small, but faithful remnant, but God used them mightily. Some of them were persecuted and martyred, but they remained faithful and affected their world for God.

As Jesus referred to this faithful remnant He once again used an analogy that related to the life experiences of the citizens of Sardis. Jesus actually used the analogy relating to the undefiled garments to emphasize two truths.

His first reference to the undefiled garments alluded to those who **“shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy,”** as being those whose sinful pollution had been cleansed by the blood of Jesus so that He could clothe them in His robes of righteousness. That is the prerequisite for anyone who would walk with Jesus. Since we are all sinners and no sin can be tolerated in His presence, we must have our sins washed away by His holy blood. Only the blood of Jesus can wash away our sins.

The second reference Jesus seems to have had in mind was indicated by His allusion to **“He that overcometh”** being **“clothed in white raiment”** and **“I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”**

Revelation 12:11 tells us that **“they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb,”** and then in 1 John 5:4-5 we read that **“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.”** Therefore, Jesus was using the term “he that overcometh” to distinguish the true believer from the pretenders and stressing that the one who was a true believer did not have to worry about losing his salvation, not matter what happened. The statement in no way indicates or suggests that it is possible to do something to cause one to lose his salvation. One's salvation rests upon the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus. It is His blood that cleanses us from all of our defiling sins.

The analogy was pertinent and clear to the people of Sardis who could lose their citizenship if they wore defiled garments before their idols. Once a sinner has submitted himself to the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, he retains nothing at all that can defile him for he is then clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. It then becomes impossible for him to be defiled or to lose his salvation.

Jesus had once said, as recorded in Matthew 10:32, that **“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven.”** His pledge to the faithful remnant in Sardis, and to us, is simply a restatement of this wonderful truth.

Once again, Jesus closed with the previously used admonition: **“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Listen to Him and do what He says!**

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CHRIST'S ADMONITION AND WARNING

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

“Remember, then repent!” Jesus issued two commands. The first one, **“remember,”** was a present tense imperative indicating that the remembering was to be a repeated, continuous experience. The second one, **“repent,”** was an aorist imperative, emphasizing the specific nature of repenting. Remembering always precedes repenting. We often fail to repent because we forget the important things in our past and have no way of measuring how away from them we have drifted and fallen. Jesus helped them know what they should remember. He referred to what they had received from Him and what they had heard from Him. He told them that they were to **“hold fast”** those things, i.e., they were to be faithful to Him and good stewards of what He had given to them.

Then, as if to draw upon the past experiences of their citizenship in Sardis, as referred to previously, He said, **“If thou shalt not watch.”** It surely would have reminded them of the danger and embarrassment that had been dealt to the city in the past by their carelessness and their failure to watch those two times the city had been conquered by the enemy. It would have been a painful reminder, provoking sadness and hurt. Continuing with the analogy, Jesus indicated to them, that just as the enemy had come upon them at a time they were not watchful, He would come upon them **“as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”**

Just as the citizens of Sardis had become vulnerable because they had become careless and slowly gone to sleep, they were vulnerable to the certainty of His judgment. People don't like to think about the coming judgment, but it is coming and Jesus warned them even as He had given warning throughout His ministry about the coming judgment. In Matthew 24:36-44 Jesus had reminded the people about the time of Noah and how judgment had come and the people had not been ready. He closed that passage by saying “be ye also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh.” Jesus told numerous parables emphasizing the message of a certain judgment when the people would not be prepared. Perhaps, never before this time in which we live has there been such a denial and casual attitude towards this awesome and fearful time, but people have always chosen to ignore God's Word about the coming judgment. In Second Peter 3:3-7 God's Word speaks clearly about this skeptical attitude.

2 Peter 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

2 Peter 3:4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

2 Peter 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

2 Peter 3:6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

2 Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

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CHRIST'S SALUTATION

As He addressed *“the angel,”* the pastor of the church, Jesus described Himself as **“These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars”**

First, Jesus pointed out to the church, representing the dead church of the dark ages of human history and now beginning to show signs of life, that true life comes from His Holy Spirit. The church may exhibit what seems to be life, but that life is false and unreal unless it flows from the Spirit of God.

Second, Jesus reminded them that He held in His hand of authority each of the **“stars,”** or spiritual leaders of the churches. These **“stars”** were to reflect His light into the churches and would be held accountable to Him.

CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION

Jesus had no commendation for the church at Sardis, except for a word of praise for a small remnant who had not defiled themselves, but He did have a statement of condemnation which He stated when He began with **“I know thy works.”** It was as if He was reminding them that He knew everything that was going on and could see past the outward appearances of the things they were doing. The church gave off the appearance that it was a dynamic, growing, lively and powerful church. It was widely known and greatly admired, but not by Jesus. Jesus said, **“thou hast a name that thou lives, and art dead.”** What appeared to be life to the world was really death, and Jesus pointed it out to them.

Too many times people, who identify themselves as God's children, live and act to please the world, not God. At the very least it is hypocritical and may even, at times, be Satanic. Rather than being concerned with impressing the secular world around it, by doing the things the world likes, God's people should only be concerned with doing those things that please God. There should never be an exception to this.

When a church seeks to please the world and gain praise from it, it is not acting as a church of Jesus Christ. The only alternative conclusion is that such a church is serving Satan and not Christ. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:10 *“For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ.”* Also refer to 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 and 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 to see more statements from God on this subject.

This stinging rebuke of Christ to the church at Sardis is always applicable to any church in any age that seeks to please the world. No matter how impressive it may be to the world, Christ sees what is true. The outward signs of life do not always indicate the presence of life; death is always death, no matter how dressed up it may be. In the world, numbers and size indicate dynamic life, but the same is not true with God. The activity and presence of God is sometimes evident only in a very small remnant of faithful believers as Jesus noted in verse 4.

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Following the letter to the compromised church, the church at Pergamos, Christ's fourth letter addressed to the Church at Thyatira, represents the time period between 590 AD and 1,000 AD, and showed us what follows compromise. The church at Thyatira, a picture of the result of compromise with the culture of paganism, became accommodating to the moral standards of the secular-pagan world, and which incorporates idolatry and co-mingles it with the worship of Jehovah.

Now we come to the letter to the church at Sardis. In church history it represents the period of The Reformation, approximately the time period which began in 1517 AD, when Luther nailed his thesis to the chapel door at Wittenberg, Germany, until about 1800 AD. This rebirth of the church from the dark ages of Romanism would lead into the beginning of the great missionary movement of the church which is represented by the letter to the church at Philadelphia in 3:7-13.

Sardis was the capital of the great kingdom of Lydia and one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. It was located inland on a plateau which rose sharply to a height of about 1,000 feet. On all sides of the city but one were smooth, perpendicular walls absolutely unscalable. The only access was on the southern side by a very steep and difficult path. Thus, the residents of the city felt safe and were, as long as the guards stayed alert and watched that one difficult steep access path. However, twice in the history of the city, in 549 BC and 218 BC, the guards fell asleep and the city was invaded and conquered.

In the city was a double temple to Cybele and Appolo. Cybele, known as Diana in Ephesus, was worshipped as the goddess of the moon and Appolo was worshipped as the god of the sun. The atmosphere of worship of these two pagan deities was extremely sensual and corrupt. Also, if a citizen of Sardis presented himself before one of the deities with soiled garments, he not only was turned away, but his citizenship was revoked and his name removed from the register of citizenship.

Against the backdrop of these very important local customs Jesus addressed His message with uniquely appropriate statements, easily understood by the citizens of Sardis, though not as easily understood by people of today.

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Revelation 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Revelation 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Revelation 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.