

DATE: November 27, 2011

TITLE: "Requirements for Renewal"

TEXT: Revelation 3: 1-13



After a week break we return to our study of Revelation and our study of the 7 churches.

We have looked at 4 and have 3 to go. This week we are looking at the church at Sardis and the church at Philadelphia. But remember this truth... these 7 churches represent all other churches... we are looking at the words of Jesus for our church at New Bedford.

I will share three lessons. First, we will compare the two churches. These churches break the pattern we have seen in our last few texts. Usually Jesus share words of commendation for the church and then follows with words of complaint against the church. For Sardis there is no words of commendation.... only complaint. And for Philadelphia there are no words of complaint... only commendation. We will compare the two churches. But most of this sermon will be a look at the process we need to go through to have renewal as a church and as individuals. I will close the sermon by the promises given to the "overcomers."

**Lesson # 1** let us compare the characteristics of a healthy church that is praised by Jesus

and an unhealthy church that is criticized by Jesus. *Rev 3: 1a,2,3b,7a,8,10*

**1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: .... 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ... But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

**7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: .... 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. .... 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.**

We first look at Sardis. Sardis was a church at peace. There was little to no persecution.

The church was worshiping and many programs were in place and functioning. I can picture this with an active Youth Group... an active Sunday school...an active ministry to the community. ...

but they were dead. The Pulpit outline says this about this church

**Such an active church can seldom be convinced that it is dead and lifeless because of its bustling activity. But Jesus Christ says it is dead. It is void of spiritual life and energy, void fo the Spirit of God. Its works are only activities, only man-made activities and social services. The works do not have the Spirit of God and His power in them.**

This church was at peace because Satan left them alone. The church was a peace because they were no threat to the community. They had compromised and accommodated to the society.

This is a terrible condemnation by Jesus.

Contrast this to the church at Philadelphia. Philadelphia was a city built on the border to

purposely be a city that allowed the Greek culture to come to the region. It was a city on a major trade route that was center of traffic and culture. It was commended for this.... it kept the Word of God... and it shared that word with others. It became a jumping off point for the Gospel of Christ to go into all of Europe. It was evangelistic and it was missionary. A healthy church always looks outside of itself.

Friday, a couple of weeks ago my wife and I went to a worship service in Youngstown at an EPC church. We heard a sermon that was 1 ½ hours long... it was wonderful. It began with this question.... How many of you believe that Eternal separation from God is the result of not surrendering to Jesus Christ?" We all raised our hands... it is a clear teaching from Scripture. Then he asked this.... do you behave like you believe this truth at work? At school? In your neighborhood? Do you act like a person who believes your friends or co workers or co students or neighbors are headed for eternal suffering separated from God?

Sardis did not care... life was good and comfortable. Philadelphia cared... they were persecuted... they were hated... but they were empowered by the Spirit of God and brought

people to Christ.

Of course the question is this.... What about New Bedford Church? What about me as an individual? Are we empowered by the Spirit of God... or going through motions? Are we looking outside beyond ourselves... or just trying to get by and survive? Are we concerned that the our neighbors need Christ or just shrugging our shoulders and “doing the best we can”. Is our worship filled with the Spirit and an encounter of a living Lord... or habit and obligation? Would Jesus commend us or condemn us?

Let me say... I believe the Spirit is alive in this place. I believe we worship a living present Lord.... but we must be careful... habits are easy to establish. Obligation rather than empowerment is easy to fall into. Let the flame of Christ be bright and hot here in this place. Expect opposition... expect condemnation... and praise the Lord

**Lesson # 2** Look at the process for renewal that is Jesus gives us. *Rev3: 2,3 states...*

**Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

Three steps to renewal are given in these verses

**Step # 1** We must wake up and watch. Jesus gives this command in *Matthew 24:42ff*

**42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**

Renewal... both personal and church renewal takes place when we live watchful lives.

Satan loves complacency. Satan loves laziness. Satan whispers...

- “you’re tired.... you deserve to sleep in this morning
- You believe in Jesus... a loving God accepts what I am willing to give
- you’re being the best person you can be... or course God accepts that.
- you go to church every week... you don’t really need to read the bible on your own.
- God understands that you can’t be a Christian all the time.

I love this text. *Romans 13: 11-12*

**11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

Wake up! Be Alert! Be Watchful! Reject the way of the world... and I love this “put on the armor of light.” The “sevenfold Spirit”... that is the Holy Spirit is with us.... He give us light and He gives us His protection. Now and forever. Wake Up!

**Step # 2 Remember.** The text says...

**Remember, therefore what you have received and heard; hold it fast.”**

It is critically important for us to remember the hand of the Lord in our lives. It is an essential building block of renewal and empowerment of the Spirit.

Joshua chapter 4 tells us of the time the Israelites crossed into the promised land.

Remember they had been wondering in the wilderness for 40 years. They had the Ark of the Covenant.... their dwelling place of God in their midst. They approached the river Jordan. The priests were carrying the Ark... they stepped into the water. The water ceased to flow and the nation crossed into the promised land. The story ends with this command...

**4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”**

God understands this truth... we need memorials. We need markers in our life that we can rest upon in order to move forward in our faith.

Here is my question.. What are the memorials in your life to remember the hand of God in you life? When can you remember encountering the living present, powerful God? Let me share with you some of mine.

- I remember in January of my Senior year when I hurt my hand being woken up on Wednesday January 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 the next morning by friends to go to bible Study. I remember I could not go... but how much I regretted not being able to be in God's word that morning. I had become a Christian but that morning, for the first time I realize how much I love the Lord Jesus Christ... and His Word
- I remember a park bench on the Niagara River. I was about 22 years old. After a break up with a girlfriend and a fiancé I rode my to that bench every night for months and encountered a living, healing Savior.
- I remember our first Couples retreat. I saw Claude and Jane Clinghan and don and dot renew their marriage vows... God was present... it was powerful.
- I am unable to go to the Niagara falls conference this year. The theme is the Tabernacle. I remember 1- to 12 years ago when they had the same theme. I can still picture in my mind the white covering coming down... the 3 to 4000 kids singing and praising the Lord and the Tabernacle being revealed. It was powerful
- I remember being in a hospital waiting room... Erin and Paul in the hospital room and the presence of the Lord being with me.

I Remember. 99% of life is just getting by. I love worship. I love reading the word of God... but I do not have wonderful experiences on a daily or weekly basis... but I remember. The power, the presence, the comfort, the joy of the presence of God. Remember. Build your Memorials. As parents, help your children to build Memorials. The are the base of our lives.... the base of our renewals.

**Step # 3** Repent. Our text says “**Repent.**”

We all blow it. As I have just told you stories of remembrance... I can also tell you even more stories of times I have not been obedient to my Lord... I won't. We all can.. Probably remembering back to our past week. Repent. This means to “Turn around.” Turn to Jesus. Confess your sins... don't just apologize... that is just words.... confess... true contrition.... true sorrow.... true empowerment to walk a new path. Repent and receive the forgiveness of the Lord.

This is the path to renewal. This is the path away from Sardis and to Philadelphia.

Renewal and commendation from our Lord.

**Lesson # 3** As an overcomer receive the white garment and the new name. *Rev 3:4,5,12,*

**4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.....**

**11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name**

We who overcome shall be dressed in white. Purity, forgiveness will be given to us. Not our purity.. The purity of Christ shall be given to us. And notice in our text again and again the idea of a new name is mentioned.

When a man and women get married usually the wife takes the last name of the husband. Why. Yes, it is convenient.. But it is also a biblical statement. In Scripture the husband is given spiritual responsibility for the family. The wife taking the name of her husband is saying.... “yes, I recognize your responsibility for this new family that we are forming... together we will be under the authority of Christ.”

By the way.. I believe that is why many women do not take on her husband’s name today... they do not want to make this statement.

The new name give a new identity. They are not one ad a family.

As children of God we receive a new name. We are adopted into the very family of God.. And we receive a new name. That new name is “Christian” or “beloved child of God”. Good news.. That name is written in the Book of life.. And will be there forever and ever.

Let us be renewed.. Ad individuals and as a church. Let us share the wonderful news of

God's love and adoption with all around us. Praise be to God

AMEN