

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN, CALEDONIA SUNDAY ADULT CLASS

**REVELATION- CHAPTER THREE PART 1 NOTES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
(to be discussed on March 5th and 12th, 2017)**

No commandment appears more frequently in the New Testament than the commandment to watch. This commandment should have been especially meaningful to the people of Sardis because of an incident that happened at Sardis centuries before. King Croesus of Sardis and his men had retreated from the Persian Army to find refuge in the high mountain fortress of Sardis. The walled city is perched 1,500 feet above the valley below, where the battle had begun, and is protected by massive walls. Feeling secure, Croesus failed to post guards. The Persian King Cyrus besieged the city for 14 days without success. Then a Persian guard saw a helmet fall from the top of the wall all the way down to the bottom of the cliff. He watched as one of Croesus men climbed down the sheer wall to retrieve it. This led Cyrus to make a closer inspection of the cliff, where he discovered a place where footholds could be made in the crumbly rock. That night he sent a raiding party up the cliff. They found the city without guard and Sardis fell to Cyrus.

Two centuries later Antiochus the Great, seeking to conquer Sardis, again found it unguarded, and the city fell to him.

So the Lord writes to the church at Sardis, Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die. 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.

Like the city of Sardis the church there, too, was dying. Founded around 1200 B.C. Sardis was universally recognized as the first metropolis of Asia and of Lydia and of Hellenism according to the oldest coins found. It was a royal city as well as a great manufacturing center. By the time of St. John the city was in decay.

All that remains of Sardis today are a few shepherds huts which comprise a settlement called Sart. The church at Sardis at St. Johns time, like the church at Ephesus, had left her First Love. Sardis, however, had degenerated more than Ephesus. Little else is known of the church there aside from what the Lord speaks. Apparently the church did not heed the Lords warning, for there is no church to be found there today. Nor is there any known record of the church there after the words of our Lord in Revelation . . . a grim reminder that the Lord will not force what is best for us upon us if we refuse it.

3:1 The Seven Spirits of God -These might be mistaken for the seven angels except for the words of God. Christ is the bearer of the Holy Spirit. Seven is the number of perfection made up of three (the Trinity) plus four (the world) (see Rev. 7:1 and 20:8). Together it means that God the Trinity's (the only true God) dealings with men are always perfect. All things work together for good to those who love God. (See Romans 8:26-28). A moral principle on the part of humans (four) is added to the intercession of the Holy Spirit (three on the part of believers (hence a total of seven). Here we get insight on how God works literally with His people. In the end, though, He will never force anyone to remain faithful to Him if they do not wish to.

I know your deeds -- God knows the very innermost secrets of a person and how what is really in our hearts leads to our deeds.

That you have a Name that you are alive -- they called themselves Christians, that they belong to

Christ and are His by faith. The Name of Christ makes alive.

And that you are dead -- refers back to their deeds. They called themselves Christians but Christ didn't know them. Their deeds or lack of them for the Lord gave them away. They followed religion and were probably kind and polite with one another, but there was no evidence of God's super-human love in their lives. Hence they showed themselves unfaithful to Christ. While we are saved by grace through faith, where there is saving faith, deeds always follow unless life is ended at the moment of faith. Even the thief on the cross testified of his faith. (2 Timothy 3:1-5 may provide a good description of the church at Sardis.)

3:2 Literally Be watching! -with the sense that they are not now watching the things that they should be. Little of Christ is left in their midst and that will soon die unless the people wake up. True faithfulness to Christ requires constant watchfulness of doctrine and practice, as well as constant repentance and forgiveness. Even we Christians must daily struggle with the Old Adam who is naturally earthly-minded and not heavenly-minded. Note: I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. -- While the deeds don't save us, their presence shows faith, and the lack of following God's commands shows lack of faith. Here, the completeness of the deeds are lacking.

3:3 Christ gives them the steps to being watchful and returning to faithfulness. The response He desires is for the person to say, If the Lord says that I should be doing differently than I am, I'd better repent of my past actions and begin doing as He asks. Even today, our Lord through His Word warns and warns as we, as is normal for us, put change off until the last minute. But with the Lord NOW is the last minute, for there will be no other. Judgment for the unrepentant shall be made before they even know the Lord is present to judge. The Greek here clearly expresses Christ's impatience toward false security. Judgment never seems immanent. God will warn, as He did for over a century before the Great Flood, and people will still be caught in complacency. Matthew 24:36-44 applies this principle to the situation at the end of the world.

3:4 There were a few faithful people (literally names -- the Lord knows who they are) left in the church. They have not soiled the holy, white spotless garment given them by Christ with the sins of unfaithfulness, or just indifference. They are worthy, not for their own sakes, but because of Christ by whose Name they are honestly called and their works proved it. These people were likely considered very strange and probably disliked by the rest of the members of the church because such people tend to bring up God's Word and faithfulness at very inconvenient times.

The people of Sardis were known for their sensual living. This way of living probably influenced many in the church. Worldly thinking added to Christianity does not make faithfulness to Christ but profanes His Name. Such people who try to mix worldly thinking and profession of Christ are dead while still alive (I Timothy 5:6).

3:5 He who overcomes -- confessing Christ in church is easy but confessing Christ by denying your inclinations and desires, and by going against public opinion when necessary, is not easy. He who overcomes these obstacles, remaining faithful to Christ, is truly faithful.

Many confess Christ, having their names written in the (figurative) Book of Life. The Book of

Life is first mentioned in Exodus 32:32-33. It represents a registry of all the citizens of the Kingdom of God. But very many will have their names erased from the Book of Life again as they allow the devil to influence them away from the Lord. That names can be removed from the Book of life demonstrates that saved, faithful people can fall completely away from saving faith. This illustrates the error of believing or teaching eternal security, as does the Parable of the sower. We must be careful any of us can and will, by neglect of our Lord's Word, be so influenced. And those who are separated from the Lord in this way never realized it and are self-satisfied with what they think is a living faith. They have a Name that is alive, but they are dead.

You can avoid this happening in your life by daily study of God's Word, with knowledge of what God says to you in His Word and with the attitude If this is what my Lord who loves me wants me to do, I'd better change my life to fit in with His will which is repentance.

It is true that, except for the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ which is ours through a living and real faith, we shall be eternally condemned as much as the person who openly hates Christ before the whole world. But if your faith is truly in Christ, and you do desire and work at overcoming the devil, the world, and your flesh, then the Gospel of salvation is God's personal guarantee to you -- your name remains in the book of life and you shall have a white robe of holiness to wear in paradise. You can be sure of it!

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation 3:1-6

1. Verse one makes it clear that these words are directed toward those who call themselves Christians. From our Lord's Words, were the majority of the members of the church at Sardis really Christians or not?

How can you tell?

2. Many in our own day have said that if a person says he is a Christian, but his life remains unchanged, we should still accept him as a Christian. Is this statement true according to I Corinthians 5:9-6:11?

What sins are listed in these verses as definite signs of an unbeliever?

3. Compare what 1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11 says with Matthew 7:1-23. Why don't these passages contradict each other? Or do they?

4. What are believers to do about such people and for what ultimate purpose? (See these verses and Matt. 18:15-17).

5. What lessons in being faithful to Christ are there in this letter for us as individuals and as a congregation?

The Sixth Letter: Philadelphia Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia -- Little is known of the city or of the history of the church there. The city was not named as the city of brotherly love but it was named after its founder, King Attalus of Philadelphus. In John's time the city was known as the gateway to central Asia. Although the city is in ruins, today the Turkish village of Alashehir stands on the site. Located in a volcanic area, earthquakes were an almost daily occurrence. This gave the Christians in Philadelphia the opportunity not only to be refined by trials, but also the opportunity to witness their faith in word and deed as different parts of the city were damaged in the frequent earthquakes.

The ancient church building is still standing. One writer states: "Among the Greek churches of Asia Philadelphia is still erect, a column in a scene of ruin." This obedient church which was commended by Christ Himself for faithfulness remains strong and alive in Philadelphia with about 1,000 members as of the latest count to be found.

3:7 Holy -- an attribute of God especially noted in the Old Testament. It is used here with the common Old Testament reference to point to the success the Philadelphian church would have in Jewish mission work. The Holy One of Israel (Is. 43:3) was the Old Testament Name of the Messiah.

Key of David -- a reference to Is. 22:20-22 where Eliakim, with his authority over the doors of the palace of King Hezekiah, is a type of Christ. The Lord has the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18) and the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19). He has given these keys to His church (John 20:21-23; Matthew 18:18). The faithful church uses both keys as instructed by the Lord to assure the unrepentant and smug of sure condemnation (the Law) in the hope of working repentance, and to bind up the broken-hearted (the repentant) and assure them of God's forgiveness (the Gospel).

3:8 Open Door -- indicates the opportunity for missions which no one will take away. Why has the Lord made the way for additional mission work? Because you have a little power -- the Word of God is Almighty power even to make alive the dead and Because you have kept My Word -- they have been faithful to the teaching of the Lord through the Apostles. And Because you have not denied My Name -- by teaching false doctrine or living in a way that brings shame to Christ. Some have suggested that the reference to a little power may also reflect the possibility that the Philadelphian church was small at this time. Here we see illustrated a principle voiced by C. F. W. Walther: the size of a church doesn't matter, what matters is its faithfulness to the Word of God. Such churches shall be prospered by God. This is the key to true growth of the church.

A principle is revealed here: True mission and genuine evangelism opportunities are a gift of God to churches that remain faithful.

3:9 Synagogue of Satan -- A bold reference to the Jews who say they are Gods children. But

Christ says they are the children of the devil because they oppose God Himself in Jesus Christ (see comments under Rev. 2:9). (See John 8:39-47, Romans 2:28-29, and 2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Contrary to Jewish assertions, biological descendency does not produce children of God, the Holy Spirit does (John 3:5-6).

And here is the new mission field -- the Jews themselves whom Christ will call by the Gospel unto repentance. The best literal translation of this part of the verse (with denoted explanations in parentheses) is as follows Behold, I shall make them (in such a way) so that they will come out (of the synagogue of Satan) and they will bow down before Your feet and they will know that I have loved you.

Here we see the dramatic change of heart known as conversion which begins with repentance when the Lord removes the scales of unbelief from the spiritual eyes of the Philadelphian Jews.

3:10 Apparently the church had gone through a period of testing and had not fallen. Since they had proven faithful in trial, the Lord promises no more trials and testings, even though the rest of the world will be tried and tested. The church has survived the awful persecution of Trajan in 98 A.D., the Ottoman Invasions, the Muslim invasions and dozens of wars. In the widest scope, these words may be taken as a reference to the unprecedented persecution of Christians which shall immediately precede our Lords return. In this light, this would also seem to be a prophecy that the Philadelphian Church will continue to exist until the return of Christ. This should show us and encourage us that no matter how much war or persecution can happen in the world, and no matter how long a time elapse, the Lord's Word will be true and His promises faithful. Those who are faithful to the Lord, no matter what happens: He will be faithful to them.

3:11 But it is still possible for them to lose their crown of eternal life so the Lord encourages them, Hold fast to what you have -- I am coming quickly. -- No Christian, no matter how great their faith and spiritual maturity, is immune from falling away. To a child, Christmas only a few days off seems like forever. As an adult Christmas, no matter how far off, comes on wings. When Christ comes we will truly appreciate the word quickly.

3:12 Pillar -- In earthquake-prone Philadelphia, the pillar was a symbol of solid permanence. Not only will the faithful who remain faithful to the end of their lives be made so solid and permanent, but they shall be so in the temple of God. The use of the word pillar (column) seems almost prophetic in light of the description of the modern Philadelphian Church "a column in a scene of ruin."

Such a faithful person shall be signed, sealed, and confirmed by three names:

- * The name of God -- adopted and named as a child of God through Jesus Christ;
- * The Name of the City of God -- the New Jerusalem the permanent address of all the saved (Phil. 3:20). This new Jerusalem is of special significance to the Jewish convert.

- * My New Name -- we are not told what this new name is. Some have suggested it is Savior Victorious.

The City of God -- The New Jerusalem is described in detail in Revelation 21:2-22:5.

These words of commendation for the Philadelphian church should encourage us to faithfulness to the Lord. No matter what kind of odds we are up against, we can be sure that the Lord has everything under His watchful control. We remember too, that it is not our great virtue or strength

of character that keeps us faithful until the end, but the virtue of Christ and the power of God that helps us overcome the world, the devil, and even our own rebellious flesh.

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation 3:7-13

1. This letter has several specifically Jewish references in it. List them and be able to explain their significance to the Jews.

2. Do our Lords Words here indicate that Judaism is not the way to God, that it is incomplete?

What is Judaism missing? (See Acts 4:12 for help).

3. Christ praised the church at Philadelphia and blessed it with a great blessing. What was that blessing and in which verse does Christ promise it?

4. What reason does Christ give for this gift and in which verse is it stated?

What lesson is there in this for us?

5. Self-evaluation: Christ's Words of Commendation to the Philadelphian congregation are wonderful indeed. This congregation also serves as an example to our congregation. But a congregation is faithful and strong only in the faithfulness and strength of its individual members. Such faithfulness and strength comes only from God. Have I been using that faithfulness and strength which God offers me?

Have I been helping others in my congregation to use their faith and the strength that God, in His love, wants them to have?