Wake Up

Revelation 3:1-13

Key Verse:3:2 “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.”

Today’s passage covers Christ’s message to the churches in Sardis and in Philadelphia. For the last two weeks we have studied Christ’s message to four other churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Can you find any common factor in Christ’s message to these four churches? Yes! Christ commended them first about their deeds, love, perseverance and faithfulness, and then he rebuked them to repent. Christ’s messages to the believers in Sardis and Philadelphia are the same as those. Christ commended their love and faith, and then he rebuked their hypocrisy and complacency. I pray that God may give us ears to hear and wisdom to understand his message for us today.

Look at verse 1. “***To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead***.” From Christ’s message we learn that the church in Sardis looks alive, but is actually dead. Here, death indicates spiritual death. Spiritual death means a broken relationship with God like broken branches from a tree. What happens to the branches when they part from the tree? They die. Jesus points out their broken relationship with God. They are like the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Jesus’ day. Jesus rebuked their hypocrisy. They had religious forms, but no love of God in their hearts. They fasted twice a week and offered regular tithing, but they did not practice the mercy and righteousness of God. They wore pompous religious robes, but they were rebuked by Jesus as white-washed tombs, which means hypocrite. They liked to teach, but they did not do what they taught. As Jesus described, they became old-wine skins, which cannot hold new wine. Their real problem was that they did not realize their spiritual death. If a cancer patient does not realize the seriousness of his or her illness, they have no way to be cured. Jesus loves the saints in the church of Sardis. So, he took a surgical knife for their surgery. Look at verse 2. Let us read verse 2 all together.

“***Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God***.” Jesus wakes them up from their spiritual death. In the Bible death often implies sleep. When Lazarus was dead, Jesus called it sleeping. (Jn 11:11) “*Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.*” Apostle Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 15:20, “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*.” We consider death as sleep because we believe in resurrection. We’ll be resurrected after we die as we wake up from our sweet sleep. Now Jesus rebukes the church in Sardis to wake up from their spiritual death. *Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die*…” After they wake up, they have to strengthen what remains in them. What does remain in them? It could be their little faith. Their remaining faith is going to die like a smoldering wick. In ancient days people lighted a lamp with oil. When oil is gone, light will die. In the same way when the believers lose their faith, they will die. What remains in us? What remains in you? Let us wake up and strengthen what remains in us so that we may finish what we started. Jesus said that he found our deeds unfinished in the sight of God. (2) What are their unfinished deeds in the sight of God? They stared all with faith. They made vows by faith. But when they lost their faith, they stopped all. They did not keep their promise with God. They left all unfinished and incomplete. What are your unfinished deeds and duties in the sight of God? Let us strengthen our little faith and finish it and complete it.

What happens if we don’t wake up or repent? Jesus will come like a thief and judge us. Look at verse 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***.” Here what we have received and heard is the gospel. It is the good news of Jesus Christ and promise for eternal life in his kingdom. We must hold it fast and never let it go. Whether storms hit or earthquakes occur, we must hold it fast. Whether the corona virus hits us or serious poverty comes, we must keep it. Even death must not take it away. Apostle Paul said about the love of God in Romans 8, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angel nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, …nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” (Ro 8:35-39)

In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus taught a parable to those who store up things for themselves, but are not rich toward God. There was a rich man who yielded an abundant harvest by God’s grace. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he tore down his barns and built bigger ones and said to himself, “ha ha. I have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” In this parable Jesus warns us against greed and selfishness. He also teaches us preparation for our sudden death because we don’t know when we will die; maybe tonight, or tomorrow, or next year. Nobody knows our future, even five minutes ahead.

Jesus also teaches us about the day of his second coming in Matthew 24:36-40. “*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man*.” No one knows when Jesus will come again to judge this world. We who are waiting for Jesus’ second coming have two options. No one can avoid these two options. First, some of us may die before Jesus comes again. Second, others may see Jesus’ second coming before they die. The rich fool is in the first option. He died before he met Christ. The people of Noah’s day are in the second option because they met God’s judgment while they were alive. Either way they all stood before the judgment of God. Hebrews 9:27 says, “*Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*.” 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (Ro 2:7-8)

The area of the seven churches flourished with the industry of dyed fabric and clothing. The city of Sardis was not an exception. In verse 4 Jesus encouraged those who kept their faith and purity as his bride. Look at verse 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***.” At that time those whose clothes were dirtied with soil or stained were not allowed to enter the temple. Those who have not soiled their clothes are those whose hearts are not dirtied with pagan worship or sexual immorality. They are worthy to join in the heavenly banquet with the Lord dressed in white. This word reminds us of wedding clothes in the parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew’s gospel. A king prepared a wedding banquet for his son and invited all his guests. But, many of them didn’t come with excuses. So, the king’s servants went out to the street and brought all kinds of people to the banquet. But the king noticed a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. The king asked, “*How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend*?” The man was speechless. (Mt 22:12) Here the wedding cloth is a white dress in today’s passage. This white wedding cloth is given only to the one who believes in Jesus Christ, his Son. He is the one who does not conform to the pattern of this world, but is transformed by the renewing of his mind. (Ro 12:2) Jesus promised to keep their names in the book of life. He said in verse 5. “***I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels***.” Amen! A few years ago, I was invited to a wedding banquet in Chicago. At the entrance of the banquet hall, the guides checked all of the visitors’ names one by one. After finding my name in the guest list, they allowed me to get in and guided me to the table with my name. Those whose names were not in the list couldn’t get in. I believe and pray that all of our names may be written in the book of life and that we all may be dressed in white and meet in the Son’s banquet in heaven. Amen!

Philadelphia in Revelation is not in Pennsylvania USA, but in modern Turkey, 25 miles southeast from Sardis. Philadelphia was an important city which connected the west and the east. It was like St. Louis, the gateway for the west. What was Christ’s message to the church in Philadelphia? “***These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open***.” (7) In his message to the church in Sardis, Christ Jesus was portrayed as the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The seven spirits of God are the Holy Spirit and the seven stars are the seven angels. In his message to the church in Philadelphia Jesus is the one who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. Here the key of David means the key for the eternal kingdom of God. David is the preview of the Messiah. God promised David that He will establish a kingdom through him and that his kingdom will endure forever. (2 Sa 7:12-16) When the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, he made an announcement about the birth of Jesus saying, “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.*” (Lk 1:31-33) Jesus has the key for his eternal kingdom. He made the key through the cross. Jesus said in John 14:6. *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Only those who receive Jesus and believe in his death and resurrection will enter the eternal kingdom of the Father God.

There were false teachers in the church of Philadelphia who misled the believers. Jesus called them those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars. (9) They were Judaisers who insisted circumcision and observance of the Jewish law from the gentile believers. Salvation is the gift of God. So, it comes from God’s grace and given through faith in Jesus. Paul said, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God…*” (Eph 2:8) By faith we can be dressed in white. By faith we can enter the kingdom of David. By God’s grace we become children of God. But Judaisers, the synagogue of Satan, taught the gentile Christians to follow Judaism plus faith in Jesus.

Jesus encouraged the believers in the church to endure patiently until he comes again. Look at verse 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.***” As I mentioned at the beginning of Revelation, Revelation starts with the second coming of Jesus and ends with the second coming of Jesus. In verse 11 Jesus said, “***I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.***” When Jesus comes again, there will be a great tribulation on this earth. The whole universe will respond to Jesus’ coming. The sun will lose its light and the moon will be darkened. We’ll see many signs of the end of the age around the world as Jesus had predicted in the gospels. Above all, there will be severe persecution against the Christians. The children of Satan try to take away the crown of life from us. But we must wake up and strengthen what remains in us. Hold on to what we have so that no one may take our crown. Jesus promised those who are victorious with a glorious reward. He will make us a pillar in the temple of God and he will write down the name of God, the name of New Jerusalem, and even the new name of Jesus. (12) Our names will be in the book of life, and the name of Jesus will be written in our hearts. What a blessing and glorious moment!

Today we studied Christ’s message to the two churches: Sardis and Philadelphia. Let us wake up spiritually and be prepared for Jesus’ second coming. Let us complete our duty and our task so that we may be worthy to wear the white clothes and the crown of life. Amen.