2017 National Ministries Conference

Calling for Revival

"The Commendation of the King"

Revelation 2–3

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I am a child of the church for I had a mom and dad who loved me, raised me in the church and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Briarwood has had plenty of men a part of it that I would consider my heroes as I have watched them growing up. For years Dr. Barker and others led this denomination faithfully in standing for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a reformed and evangelical manner. I am thankful to a part of that legacy. I was at Christ Covenant in Charlotte, North Carolina where I watched Dr. Reeder and now I'm here at Briarwood. I am thankful for faithful, Godly men who have led me well as I was maturing in the faith. I'm thankful for the elders who help pass the baton from one generation to the next for they are the faithful backbone behind a church like this. I thankful to be a part of this staff and for the staff for they have earned my respect now. This congregation has been incredibly loving to me and my family and we feel at home here. You all work hard and that is not a characteristic you see in churches all across the land.

Now I have this opportunity to present the Word of God to you. I pray God will use me to bring to you His Word faithfully and I pray that when we finish this study that you would not just be puffed up with knowledge but that Jesus Christ may do something in your heart. Perhaps there are some reading this that need to come to a saving knowledge of Him today and that God will call you to a faithful ministry for His Kingdom.

I have recently been talking to our missionaries about Jesus meeting a suffering brother. John says in Revelation 1:9, [9] I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Here John is basically calling himself a partner in the Kingdom of God and that is what brothers do – they go to work for the King and His Kingdom. He is a faithful brother who has planted churches, discipled others, leading worship, and served well but he also calls himself a partner in tribulation. Why? It is because he has seen his fair share of God's people being faithful and suffering whether it was through the Apostles, Steven, his brothers and sisters and even himself.

Jesus said they would drink of the cup and John has experienced it and now at the age of 95 where does this faithful saint find himself? I used to think he was marooned on this island of Patmos but no, for he was exiled and imprisoned on this island and probably engaged in forced labor. Why? It is because he is faithful to the Word and testimony. I think he is struggling and Jesus Himself says 'I'm going to help him.' That is the really good news because what Jesus did then I think He might do right now. He may do things a little differently but here is the principle.

Here is a hurting saint who on the Lord's Day is overcome by the Lord's Spirit, who gets the Lord's revelation and the Lord does an effectual work in His heart. Wouldn't that be wonderful for you, if on the Lord's Day you who are suffering might be touched by the Lord's Spirit, touched by the Lord's revelation found in His Word and the Lord's effectual power might encourage you to keep going? In this study I will be focusing on how Jesus will encourage John to encourage His churches. Jesus is going to talk to suffering churches as we look at Revelation 2 and 3.

Jesus knows these churches well. Revelation 1 He walks around the candle sticks. He holds the ministers of the message, the angels in His strong right hand. He is the One with the piercing gaze that sees right through us. He is the Son of Man who is always present around His church. In Revelation 2 and 3 we continually hear Him say 'I know... I know... I know...' and that's because He knows. He is a good Pastor. He knows His church. He is the Head of His church, He is watching and He has something to say to her, His church. So often we hear from this text calls to repentance and think 'here it comes again.' In this study we're going to do it a little differently where I am going to present the words of commendation from Jesus. In the next study we'll look at His causes of concern.

It is important for us to hear these words of commendation from Jesus because I've learned as a coach you can only yell so many times from the sidelines 'you idiots!' or perhaps discouragement sets in. So we need to hear at times 'good job, you're running hard, awesome, great team work!' I have also learned this in parenting of both the positive and negative reinforcements. There are times when you need to have a 'come to Jesus' meeting with your sons because what you see is not okay.

One of the most meaningful times for me as a parent was when my son graduated from high school and we were throwing a party for him. I wrote a letter to him and with tears rolling down my eyes I read this letter to him about how I have passed on the faith to him and the man he had become. I was proud of him and I would think those words of commendation to my son carried much more weight than those other times when I lost my cool and went at him with causes of concern. That is the attitude I would have as we look at this text today.

Jesus loves you. He has died for you. You don't have to earn His approval. He has not changed in His affection for you. He is looking at you today and saying 'I see some of the things you are doing and I'm really proud of you. I love it and I want to say well done. Keep going.' I want to give seven on those things that we'll walk through together. First, let's look at the commendations of Jesus from Revelation 2 and 3.

Revelation 2:1–6 says [1] "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[2] "'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. [3] I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. [6] Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:8–9 says [8] "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. [9] "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Revelation 2:12–13 says [12] "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. [13] "'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Revelation 2:18–19 says [18] "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished

bronze. [19] "'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."

Revelation 3:1–4 says [1] "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. [2] Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. [3] Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. [4] Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

Revelation 3:7–10 says [7] "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

[8] "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [9] Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. [10] Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." That is the inspired Word of God. The rest of what I say is not inspired but I trust it will be true to the inspired Word of God.

So there are seven things here that when the Lord looks at His church says 'well done.' I don't want you to think of this institutionally because that is what we seem to always do as we start evaluating that church or this church or even looking at Briarwood. Perhaps that is the job of the elders and the staff to look at Briarwood to see where they are. Your job may be big enough if you just look at yourself and say 'I want to be the kind of church person that Christ looks at and says 'well done.'

The first thing in this passage is that Jesus commends His church for their faith. What is faith? Here are three words I would give you for faith – hearing, believing and resting. It is the idea of hearing information, believing that information is true and then determining to rest in that information. It is what I do when I follow Siri on my phone for a place called Niki's West that is supposed to be a meat-in-three that is second to none. When I say 'Siri where is Niki's West?' it gives me information. I believe that information and start following its prompts. I get to this place called dysfunction junction and I rested in the information it gave me. It didn't lead me astray so I had faith in Siri and it worked out well.

It is what the people of Florida, Louisiana and Texas have to figure out when a hurricane is coming their way as they hear the news report on the storm that is coming. They hear 'this is bad you need to evacuate' and the elder person is sitting there thinking 'this is my home, it's all I have, what should I do?' are they going to believe or not believe. Those with faith walk out the door to the transport provided for them and rest in the information they have received.

We are to receive information from the Word of God. We are to look at that information and say 'this is true truth' and then you are to submit yourself to that revelation but this is not what we do. In our natural condition we are too wise to listen to Scripture. We think we know better. Perhaps we're too foolish to listen to Scripture. We don't know the truth. We don't regard the truth. We stuff the truth down and fill our minds with what some might call the 'fake news' of this world. Thanks be to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the true Truth. He is the Amen,

the Verily, the One who came and died for our sins, our lack of faith. Jesus Christ is called the Author of faith, who gives the gift of faith.

Those of us who say we don't believe somehow find ourselves one day believing and it's because Jesus and His Holy Spirit are just that good, powerful, loving and wooing and that's why we take no pleasure in our own abilities for it's all the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working in us that which is pleasing to Him for without faith no one can please God. Some day we get to declare our faith in our repentance because of the work of God. What do we do from this point forward?

Faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. He who gifts us faith, fruits us faith. We partner in sanctification with Him. What would that look like? This is the pay off. Do you want to be people that Jesus looks at? First of all have gratitude and be thankful for that which you have received. Have humility, so instead of looking at all those who don't believe as if you can't believe their stupidity, you realize why were you a guest invited to the feast and it's all because of the Lord. Then there is encouragement. You find yourself believing the Gospel which isn't natural and the Bible says you can't on your own therefore this is a great evidence that should assist you in your salvation. What about the eagerness to learn? Put yourself under the Word of God where its preached, read, sung, taught, discussed, and memorized because you need good truth. Repent of your disbelief of the truth that you have put yourself under.

Finally just rest in it because that is what faith is. It is receiving the Word of God, trusting in it and resting in it. Rest in the fact that Jesus Christ paid it all. Hear it. Believe it. Stop your striving. Sabbath, enjoy what He has done for you and don't let others put you in the grind where you have to earn the affection of God anymore. You don't have to do that because Jesus has paid it all so rest in the Gospel.

Secondly, rest in the law now. Psalm 1:1–3 says [1] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. God wants what is best for you so read what He says. Read His principles and believe them to be true. Say 'Lord, I am ready to be molded after Your image.' Jesus looks at people like that with faith and says 'well done.'

Secondly, Jesus commends His church for their love. What is love? I love ice cream. I love soccer. I love my wife. I love God. There is a whole lot of love going on but they better not mean all the same thing. Here is my definition of love. It is a one way internal compassion and external commitment to the well-being of another. Sometimes in theological circles we may hear 'I have this covenantal love, it's not a feeling but a decision' and I can be guilty of that but that doesn't work well with my wife. It also doesn't work well when she asks me if I love her and I say that I have too in my cute little way. I have made a vow between me and God that no matter how I feel on the inside I will never leave her till death do us part. Who likes that kind of love? She expects a love from the inside that involves these feelings, emotions and commitment from the chest which manifests itself in the way I treat her.

That is what God requires of love. We are to love Him from the inside with our heart, soul, mind and then with your outside, your strength. That is why this is the first commandment and greatest of all commandments. If you want to know how to please God and keep His law then just love Him. He looks at all those who love Him adequately, perfectly, never failing and says 'I like that' but there's the problem. We love ourselves way more than we love God or those created in God's image. Thanks be to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for Jesus expressed His

love when He came to earth as He saw our need and had compassion on us. Jesus Christ lived for us and earned love as He put it on our account. He died for our lovelessness and put it on His account.

God poured His love into our hearts. Romans 5:5 says [5] and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Now we are people who are viewed who love God perfectly, all the time, without fail because the Judge sees us clothed only in the righteousness of Christ and declares us who are loveless to be lovely only because of Jesus. That's the Gospel. Now we worship Him because He loved us so much that we love Him back. I John 4:19 says [19] We love, because he first loved us. This is worship. Love is a fruit of the Spirit that comes from within that manifests outside and this is why we do what we do.

Why do we learn the Bible? It is because we want to know what God thinks. Why do we gather in worship? It is because this is a love fest between His bride and the Groom. Why do we fellowship? It is because in loving God we learn to love those in the household of faith. Why do we engage in evangelism and missions? It is because like Jesus we are learning to love even our enemies and those who are not in the household of faith with us. What should you do? Partner with the Holy Spirit. Keep in step with the Spirit. Pray that God will change you from the inside out. Do not be satisfied with external religiosity that says as long as I keep covenant on the outside He is pleased because He is not. Moralists do that. Christians are transformed from the inside out for they have both an internal compassion and an external commitment to God and those created in the image of God.

Thirdly, Jesus looks at the church that has obedience and says 'Well done.' We see this in Revelation 3:8 and 10 which says [8] "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [10] Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." It's the words that say 'hold fast, keeping My Word, and obeying.'

Jesus made it clear when He said He wants us to hear and obey. James makes this clear in James 1:22–25 which says [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; [24] for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

We look in the mirror, saw the truth, believed it was true, submitted ourselves to what we saw and then we go to work for what we believe. We are saved not by our works but we respond by doing good works. We are not saved by our faithfulness, we are saved by faith and then we become faithful. This is the idea of us being positionally saved and you are called a saint because of what Jesus does for you but then you progressively grow and mature as a saint because of what God starts to do through you and He refuses to leave you the same way.

We are rebels though. Lucifer was the ultimate rebel and we proved to be children of the devil because we have this independent, rebellious streak. Thanks be to Jesus Christ who was the Son who obeyed always and perfectly. Now when we are found in Christ we are granted His report card. His is perfect ours is failing but if you're found in Him then you now have His report card with perfect obedience and that's only because of what Jesus has done. Jesus paid the price and was crucified for my sins, my rebellion against the Father. What do we do now? We worship for you have been redeemed by Jesus, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, given gifts of

faith and repentance so that you were justified and declared righteous. You were filled by the Spirit, adopted into the household of faith and now God is your Father, you are His child and you obey. That is what Christ is calling you to do, obey. No one enjoys reconciliation with God or keeps the reconciled status because of their works.

The true Christian has liberty where they can say with confidence 'He knows what is best for me. He has the right to command me but I should want to obey because of His love for me, what He has done for me and because He is my Father. I am His child.' So now we look at the good law of God not as something we have to do to get God to love us but because God loves us and we love Him. We get to obey. Use the mirror of God's Word regularly. Be that Psalm 1 Christian who meditates on God's law day and night and finds himself fruitful and well-nourished for this is the way we want to live. When God sees a people longing for Him and wanting to do for Him a smile comes across His face and He says 'those are My children and I like that. You are doing well My sons and daughters.'

Fourthly, Jesus commends His church for their purity. We see this in Revelation 3:1 and 4 which says [1] "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. [4] Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Purity means we are not to delight in the sorted nature of sin within or without and people are to look at us and see a difference in the way we live our life.

All of those in the church of Sardis should have had a reputation for not having soiled garments. Some of them had the reputation of not having soiled garments but it was a lie, a sham, a false presentation, for inwardly they were dead. Some really did have the reputation of their garments being white but we're not really sure what the sins were that they were being called out for. Once again, God is calling His church to have a purity from within that manifests itself in a purity without and is able to be seen by the world. Oh how we need Jesus!

I can do a pretty good job of keeping a good reputation due in some respects to the fact that I get paid to do that as a minister but I know the depravity that rages within. An external piety is just not good enough. It is good enough to make me like a zealous Saul of Tarsus who was just a moral religious man on his way to hell. Thanks be to Jesus who was pure. He never had an impure desire. He loved the things His Father loved and hated the things He hated. He never had an impure word that came out of His mouth. He was holy. He was the light that was drawing men to Himself and the Father. He did His good works so that people would glorify His Father in heaven.

There are a lot of cults that outshine us in their external display of morality. God wants the external display of morality but He wants the internal reality. He cares about image and character but He cares about character first. So let Jesus Christ teach you that which is true. Go to Him in prayer often and be honest with Him about your impure thoughts. When you are pursuing purity by gathering around the Word to learn what is right, fleeing temptation, being accountable then your Father who looks as you being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus and says "I love you. Keep going. I'm so proud of you. I love the church that honors purity."

Here is a quote from Billy Sunday (a fundamentalist Baptist preacher) about purity and perhaps this can be our model of purity; "Listen, I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist, I've butt it as long as I've got a head, and I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old, fistless, footless, and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to perdition." This is just a Godly man who knows how bad sin is and learning to hate the heinousness of sin. God, help me to fight it till the day I die.

Fifthly Jesus commends His church for their work ethic. Briarwood has had a long work ethic and that's good because that is what is required from God. God would not want this to be a group of consumers who are coming to evaluate what we have to see if they want to be a customer. God is not looking for cruise ship critics who just come for the enjoyment and for a little pick-me-up with whatever is going on or the food we offer. God has not called us to be country club constituents who dress nicely, come together once a week, nod at one another in the locker room and out on the course and that is the end of our commitment to one another. God has not called us to be lazy or lethargic and certainly not to be retired from Christian ministry. Sadly, we are lazy, lethargic, quit and pick our times of laboring. Thanks be to Jesus who worked for us. Every one of these sections has law, Gospel and worship tied to it and this is a good grid that I think you should look at Scripture through.

So what should we do? Romans 12:1 says [1] I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (KJV). This is reasonable for we learn in Romans 1 through 11 all that Jesus has done for us and now let's go work for Jesus as living sacrifices. What would that look like? It would come out in worship where we would gather as often as we can to work at giving Jesus the glory that He deserves. In discipleship and education, let's work to study the Word of God so that we're not workmen who are ashamed but are rightly dividing the Word of God. Let's make it a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Let's work in fellowship. It is not that this church works for me but I am now a part of the household of faith and your business is my business. I can't wait to get engaged in small groups, Sunday school classes, various ministries, youth ministry for my kids where we are using spiritual gifts all over the place. This is because all of us our working and that's what our missionaries do where they serve, isn't it? No, it's not what they do as missionaries but what we do as missionaries. Many of our missionaries are supported by your donations and you're self-funded but God has called us to use our skills, talents, platforms, energies, and relationships in our communities to work in the areas of evangelism and making disciples. Jesus looks at a church that's not lazy, like Briarwood and says 'well done, I'm proud of you.'

I've met lots of people since I've been here and many of you were led to faith by the first generation of leaders here at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. It is not unusual for me to here that someone was led to the Lord by Dr. Barker. The mantel has been passed from one generation to the next. The staff around me are seeking to be faithful to that which has been passed down. So what about us millennials? Are we taking the torch to the next generation? Are we faithful to be self-sacrificing workers engaged in Gospel expansion because we want to make much of the King and His Kingdom? May God help us.

The sixth thing Jesus commends His church for not bearing with evil ones. This area will strike against the tolerant vibe of the day. There are two sins mentioned in Revelation 2:1–6. There are those who are the *Nicolaitans*, those who are engaged in false teaching. It is wrong to be engaged in immorality, idolatry or any falsity. Then there is the second sin where we may have tolerated this. Sometimes we have to be like the father of the prodigal son where we stand

for truth, love with the truth, expect the truth and enjoy the household of faith who are centered on the truth but we find people within the household who just want nothing we have to offer and they do not plan on any way heading in the same direction. We love and care for them. We beg them to change. We cry with them but sometimes there comes a point where you just have to say 'bye my son, but we are praying for you and the moment you start heading back in this direction we will run towards you with all haste because we can't stand living without you.'

That is a good way of looking at what John Calvin called one of the three marks of the church. It is faithful preaching of the Word of God, faithful worship around the sacraments and church discipline. When Jesus Christ looks at us, as with boldness we stand, our lips quivering and our eyes moist with tears, because we have to finally say 'bye my son, please come home.' He looks down and says 'that's true love for Me and My glory, that's true love for the flock you are protecting and that's true love for the person who is living in inerrant sin. I'm not asking you to be tolerant of sin but loving.' When Jesus sees Briarwood standing like that He is pleased.

Finally, Jesus commends His church for suffering and patient endurance. We see it in Revelation 2:2, 3, 9, 13, 19, 3:8 and 10. These churches suffered satanic persecution. The tribulation was not something that was going to happen for John has already said he was suffering tribulation. They suffered cultural persecution for they were mocked by the Greeks. They suffered ecclesiastical persecution by people like Saul of Tarsus who was seeking to ravage the church. They suffered financial persecution because they were blackballed when they would not go to the guilds. They suffered governmental persecution as the sword of the state was added to the declaration of false churches and cults because they would not cry out 'Caesar is Lord' so they would be thrown in prison. They suffered family persecution and Jesus said they would. Families were separated from those who called themselves Christians. In these churches though there are people standing tall amidst the persecution and Jesus says 'I'm proud of you.'

We believe that Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna at this time and I want to end with his story. He was taught by the people of John and was brought under charges because he would not say 'Caesar is Lord.' They tried him. They scared him and threatened him but he still would not say 'Caesar is Lord.' Finally the governor said 'Don't you know I have wild beast?' Still he would not say 'Caesar is Lord.' "Don't you know that after the wild beasts I will burn you?' Still he would not say 'Caesar is Lord.' Polycarp said 'Eighty and six years I have served and he never did me injury, how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior? You threaten me with fire that burns for an hour and after that it is extinguished but you are ignorant of the fire of coming judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, but why tarry thou, bring forth what thou will.' In other words, here I stand and I can do no other which is the language of Martin Luther or in my own language, 'bring it on.'

I think tribulation is coming your way and some of you have already encountered it. More is to come for it is to be expected. Do not be surprised by it and don't by the lie of prosperity theology. When Jesus Christ looks at His church and they are singing 'No turning back, no turning back, I have decided to follow Jesus' based upon this text in Revelation I think He has a smile on His face.

Here is how I would end. There are those who were religious in the Bible called Pharisees and this is what describes them; they love the approval of men rather than the approval of God and many of them have suffered the fate of hell. Yet there are religious fanatics who are not religious frauds who love the approval of God more than anything else and it's not natural to them for they are just made that way. May that be true of Briarwood Presbyterian Church – a bunch of religious fanatics characterized by these seven attributes and when the Father looks

from heaven the Son says 'Hey Father, you see those, they are Mine. That's My bride and I love her and I'm so so proud of her.' Then I love to hear Jesus whispering to all of us 'well done My good and faithful servant.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Thank You Father for what You have done for us in the Gospel. Thank You that You who began a good work in us is faithful to complete it and will continue it on until the final day. Thank You that we have had some success in these regards and please help us as a church to have greater success but as individuals let us focus on ourselves. As we see where we have grown cold may we quickly repent, enjoy the Gospel and worship You aright, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Jesus Commends His Church for Their:

Faith

Love

Obedience

Purity

Work

Not Bearing with Evil Ones

Suffering and Patient Endurance