

Revelation 3

Edited & Highlighted from "The Word For Today" Transcription

Pastor Chuck Smith, Tape #8242

Let's turn now to Revelation chapter three as Jesus continues His messages to the church. And as we have pointed out, Jesus was addressing churches that existed at that time in Asia Minor. The seven churches that signify the completeness of the church. There were other churches there in Asia Minor that are not listed. There was the church at Colossi that Paul wrote the Colossian letter to. There was a church in Hierapolis that is also mentioned in the New Testament but the Lord selects the seven churches to sort of give us a complete overview of the church.

Not only were the letters addressed to the seven churches that existed, but they also covered the seven periods of church history, as we have observed thus far and will continue to observe tonight. The Lord sort of gave an interesting outline of the future of the church. The history of the church, more or less, in advance, the stages that the church would go through.

There is a third type of application and that is, each of the churches that are addressed do exist today in some form or other so that all of the messages to the seven churches have an application to the church today. There is something in each of the messages for us. And so as Jesus said, He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. And so as we come into chapter three,

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 you have a name that you live, and you are dead (3:1).

Not quite a wonderful introduction to the church! Sardis was a city that was built at the top of the plateau which was about fifteen hundred feet above the valley floor. It was in a way much like Masada in that you had the sheer cliffs and there was only the one path, the narrow path up to the top and that was the only entrance into the city, and thus they felt that it was impregnable. That it was impossible for it to be conquered. And thus, they dwelt in relative safety and security. It was a very wealthy city. The king of the city in the early days sort of had that Midas touch in that everything he did seemed to prosper and they said that everything he touched turned to gold, much like Midas.

When the Persian empire was strong and conquering the other nations, the king decided that he would go to war against Persia. He went to the oracle of Delphi there in Greece and he got the message from the oracle that if he made a campaign against the Persians, that a great empire would fall. And bolstered by that message from the oracle, he sent his troops out towards Persia. However, he was soundly defeated and they retreated back to their fortress city. What he didn't stop to realize that the empire that would fall would be his own. The oracle didn't make that clear.

And so Cyrus pursued him back to the city of Smyrna. And he offered a large reward to any soldier who could conquer the city. One of the soldiers noticed that a soldier on the top of the city defending the walls sort of slumbered off and as his head nodded, his helmet fell down the cliff and so he watched the soldier as he came on down this crevice into the area where the helmet had fallen and retrieved it and went back up. And so he figured that this city could be entered by this crevice up there and at night, he led a contingent of soldiers up that crevice, they scaled the wall, and they found that everyone was asleep. There was no guard upon the walls, there was no guard in the city and they were able to conquer the city while it slept.

It was only conquered twice and the second time it was conquered was much the same. They felt so safe in this fortress that they did not have any guards even on the path that leads to the fortress and thus, when they came up, they found that the guards were asleep actually and they were able to take the city the second time. Twice the city of Sardis fell. Both times it was because they weren't on watch. And that will become important in the message to the church in Sardis.

Jesus describes Himself again out of chapter one as the One who has the seven Spirits of God and as we looked at these seven Spirits of God in chapter one, we referred you back to Isaiah chapter eleven where it talks about the coming Messiah and how the Spirit would be upon Him and the sevenfold working of the Spirit of God in the life of Jesus. And so it is that completeness of the work of the Spirit in the life of Christ by which we get this term, The Seven Spirits of God, it will come up again when we get into chapter four. But it doesn't mean that there are seven Holy Spirits. Again the number being significant, speaking of completeness, the complete work of the Spirit in the life of Jesus.

And the seven stars, and of course, the seven stars were the ministers to the seven churches that are being addressed. "I know thy works, that you have a name that you live, but really you are dead."

When you look at the church of Sardis from a historic period of the church history, Sardis is the church of the Reformation. It was born in the 1500's and it exists to the present day, the Protestant Reformation. And surely in the Protestant Reformation, though it began with a mighty move of God's Spirit, and you have such great names as Luther and Calvin and Knox and Zwingli and Huss and all, these wonderful names, and it was born in a marvellous renewal of the scriptures and a love for the scriptures, yet it soon developed into an organizational structure and as the Lord says a little bit down the road here, I did not find your works perfect or complete. The Protestant Reformation was not a total or a complete reformation.

They carried many of the Babylonian traditions from the Catholic church on into the Protestant church and thus, it soon became dead. Dead Protestantism. And many of the great denominations once alive in the things of God have become dead today in a dead orthodoxy. And so the Lord says,

Be watchful (3:2).

As I said, Sardis had fallen twice because they weren't watchful and now He is saying to the church, "Be watchful,"

and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works complete or perfect before God (3:2).

Infant baptism is not taught in the scriptures. Nor do we see any practice of infant baptism in the scriptures. It was an invention of the Catholic church, it was borrowed from the Babylonian religion when the church state was formed by Constantine. Because Constantine was wanting to create a church state that would more or less include everyone, because the Romans were deeply steeped in a religious system that traced its origins back to the mysteries of Babylon, many of the things of the Babylonian religion were just you might say Christianized. They took the pagan holidays and they gave Christian names to them and said that they actually now represent Christian events.

For instance, the Romans had the celebration of Saturnalia. It was borrowed from the ancient Babylonian religion and it was actually the celebration of the birth of Tammuz to his mother Semiramis. Semiramis was called the mother of god. Tammuz was worshipped as god in the Babylonian religion. And so you had the mother and child. And in the ancient pictures of Semiramis, there is always a halo above her head and above the head of little Tammuz.

So the Romans had taken this holiday, which was purely pagan. It was a holiday that was celebrated by a lot of drinking, the lighting of bonfires, the idea of course, it came at the winter solstice, as the days were getting shorter and shorter. There was that superstitious fear that the sun was waning, it might die, we've got to help it out, and so the lighting of the bonfires and all to get more light and then as the days became longer, that you could visibly see the days are getting longer on the 25th of December, they had this huge party, gift giving, celebrations, and a lot of drunken orgies.

And thus, when they made Christianity the state religion, they took this pagan holiday of Saturnalia and they said this is the birthday of Jesus. This is what we'll celebrate on December 25th. Though there is no indication in the scriptures at all just when Jesus was born, the chances of His being born on December 25th are very slim in that the shepherds were watching their flocks by night and they didn't do that after late October. And so it's just a date that was borrowed from the pagan religions.

The celebration of Easter. Actually the word Easter comes from the pagan goddess Astarte. And it was at the spring solstice as they celebrated the new life. And of course, because the egg represents perpetuated life, they would color eggs and have these various parties and all that surrounded the colored eggs. And so the church adopted that and they took the name from Astarte and they said this is Easter and we'll celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter.

So when the Protestant Reformation came, they took a lot of these things that originated in the ancient Babylonian religion. We'll get this when we move in to chapter seventeen and we will see mystery Babylon the great and as we study that, we'll see the tremendous comparisons between the Babylonian religion and the church state religion that was established under Constantine when he signed the edict of toleration.

So Luther carried over the infant baptism though there is no scriptural basis for it. The concept and the idea that if your child is baptized, it is saved. And you were saved by infant baptism. But not the preaching of the necessity of being born again. There are many people today within the Protestant church who by virtue of the fact that they were baptized when they were babies, they feel that they are Christians. My parents had me baptized. I have my baptismal certificate. And though their lives do not reflect anything at all of Christianity, though they are not really living for Jesus, they have a name that they are alive, but really, spiritually they are dead. And because they are trusting in a false hope, the hope that I'm saved because I was baptized as an infant.

Many people when they really discover what it is to be born again want to be baptized again, though they were baptized as infants, because that was their parents' decision. And it is interesting that in a lot of churches where they practice infant baptism, then they have a big party afterwards and oftentimes there's a lot of drinking and drunkenness and all. In the parties they celebrate we baptized our baby in church today. A name that they are alive but they are really dead.

Much of the Babylonian influence was carried over into the Protestant church at the Protestant Reformation and thus the Lord said, "I have not found your works perfect or complete before God." There wasn't a complete break. And so the Lord said,

Remember therefore how you have received and heard (3:3),

The Protestant Reformation, the churches that came out of the Protestant Reformation, it would be good for them, it would be well if they would go back and remember the origins. How that Luther stepped out and God gave to him the glorious message, The just shall live by faith. And if they'll go back to Luther who wrote "the Spirit and the gifts are ours" and speaks about the gifts of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit and his tremendous commentaries on the Word of God. If they would go back to that, they would be blessed and benefited. And the Lord is encouraging them to remember their roots.

If the Presbyterian church would go back to John Knox. If the Methodist church would go back to John Wesley. If they go back to the beginnings and see how it was received or how it started. But how far they have gone from the origins of the church. So that actually, Wesley would not be welcomed in most of the Methodist churches today.

"Remember how you have received and heard,"

and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon thee (3:3).

And so the importance of them watching. If they didn't watch, the coming of the Lord for the church would be as a thief. And Jesus in giving the parables in regards to His coming again for the church, the rapture of the church said "that if the goodman of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore watch and be ye ready, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man is coming" (Matthew 24:43,44).

When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he said that "you know that the coming of the Lord is as a thief in the night. But then Paul qualified it and said, You are not the children of darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. But you are children of the light. Walk therefore as children of the light, not in wantonness or drunkenness" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-7) or whatever. And so the warning of the church of Sardis is

that because it was asleep, because of the spiritual lethargy, when the Lord would come, they would be caught by surprise and of course, the implication is that they would not be taken with the rapture of the church. "You do not know what hour I will come upon thee." So then,

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

Protestant Reformation, the churches that have come out of it are not all bad. There are some marvellous ministers in the Lutheran church, in the Presbyterian churches. I think of Dr. Kennedy back in Coral Ridge and I think of Walter Maier, that marvellous minister of the Word of God who, of course, is now with the Lord but I listened to him every Sunday for years on *The Lutheran Hour*. These were mighty men of God. They are there.

But unfortunately, when you look at the church as a whole, it has become very cold, very formal, very ritualistic and has a name that is alive but it is ready to die. So "they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."

He that overcometh (3:5),

And to each church there are the overcomers and we must not neglect that. God has His people in every situation.

they will 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 (3:5).

Those who hold very strict to the idea of eternal security, that once you have received Jesus Christ or have been saved that you can never be lost no matter what you do, have great difficulty with this verse. It is interesting to read their commentaries and see how they try to skate around the words of Jesus. Where Jesus said, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life," is it possible that a person's name could be blotted out of the book of life? If it is not possible, then the words of Jesus are totally meaningless. Why would He even make such a suggestion unless such a thing was possible?

I would discourage anyone who is walking in sin to take comfort in the fact that you went forward in a Billy Graham Crusade with a hundred or a thousand other people in the Coliseum years ago. And there you filled out a card. And you've been on the *Decision* magazine list ever since. That you would trust in that experience that you are saved tonight. Salvation is never a past tense experience. A relationship with Jesus should never be in the past tense. It needs to be in the present tense. And do not be deceived. If you are walking after the flesh and involved in the things of the flesh, you have no assurance of being in the kingdom of heaven.

When Paul was writing to the Ephesians, he gave a very serious warning. He said, "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God as a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient." The whole idea there is of filthy language, dirty jokes. "But rather the giving of thanks. For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person [that is, sexually impure], nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:2-6). So Paul said, Don't be deceived on this score. If you're living and doing these things, don't think that you have any inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if you're led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I have told you before, as I have also spoken in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:17-21).

If you are involved in these things, you have no assurance of eternal life. You have no assurance that you are going to have a part in the kingdom of God. And Paul said much the same thing to the church of Corinth.

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind [and it’s talking about the male prostitutes], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you were this way: but you are washed and you are sanctified, and you’ve been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

So the warning about being deceived. The doctrine of eternal security is something that has been argued in theological circles since Calvin came out with his institutes of theology. But as a minister, I do not want to be guilty of giving someone false security. I don’t want to assure you that now that you’re saved, you can go out and live however you wish. It doesn’t matter if you’re involved in pornography or if you’re involved in fornication. Doesn’t matter. You’ve been saved. And when you stand before the great white judgment of God and are condemned, I don’t want you pointing to me and say, Pastor, you gave me false assurance.

Paul said, Don’t be deceived. If you’re involved in these things, you have no part in the kingdom of God. And I want to make it just as straight as possible. I believe that it is possible to apostasize. To turn your back upon an experience that you once had with God. I know of men who have done this. Men that when I was a young man, I looked up to and admired as great men of God. Powerful evangelists.

I think of Charles Templeton who was involved with the Youth for Christ and I would go anywhere to hear him. He was dynamic, he was powerful. And many people came forward at his meetings. He began with Billy Graham and they were associates in the early years. He went up to Canada and held great meetings up in Canada. Became a pastor of a church in Toronto. But recently has written a book in which he totally denounces his belief in Jesus Christ. Totally denounces his belief even in God. He’s an atheist. Totally denounces his early confessions of faith and is seeking through this book to bring doubt and unbelief in the minds of people. I cannot believe that he is a child of God tonight. That if he died tonight, the Lord would overlook this and save him anyhow because he once made a profession of faith. I think he is in that category that Jesus warned, his name would be blotted out of the book of life.

And so the Lord is warning the church of Sardis that they were in danger of being blotted out. But the Lord said, “If you overcome, not only would you not be blotted out, but that He would confess your name before my Father and before His angels.” Jesus had said, “If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father in heaven. But if you deny me before men, then I will deny you before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32,33). The denial of Jesus is a terrible thing. Under pressure to deny the Lord is a terrible thing.

Peter was guilty of that terrible sin. But there’s forgiveness. That’s the wonderful thing. It may be that under pressure or strain, you denied your relationship with Jesus at one time or another. But there’s forgiveness. Peter was forgiven and God used him in a mighty way at the beginning in the birth of the church.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches (3:6).

Now to the church in Philadelphia write (3:7);

The church in Philadelphia lasted longer than the other churches except for Smyrna. The church, there is a Christian church in Smyrna to the present day. I actually had the privilege of preaching in the church of Smyrna. There is a church there at the present time. The church of Philadelphia did last until about 1300 or so when the Turks came and murdered the remaining Christians that were there, destroyed the church. But there remains the ruins of a Byzantine chapel there to the present day. It’s about all that remains of the ancient city of Philadelphia. “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;”

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, and he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens (3:7);

So the Lord introducing Himself now as the One who has the key of David. The One who can open and no man shuts, shuts and no man opens. And the Lord said,

I know your works: and behold, I have set before you an open door (3:8),

I believe that the Lord so often leads us by opening and shutting doors. And when we are seeking God to guide our lives, seeking direction, I believe that God so often leads us by opening a door of opportunity for us. I

believe that God often stops us by closing the door. And I don't believe when God closes a door to try and force it open or break it down. I've learned to just accept closed doors as well as I have open doors. And I have learned to just recognize, Well God's closed that door and you take off in another direction.

You're sort of like the little kid who spent several months in building a model sailboat. Had every detail down to perfection. And after he finally got the thing all set, the mast upon it and everything else, he took it down to the pond and he set it in the water and he set the sails and the rudder so that it would go across the lake. And he watched the little sailboat as it started across the lake and he went running around the end of the lake but as he was running around looking at that sailboat out there, a gust of wind came and blew the thing over and it sank in the middle of the pond. He looked up and he said, That's a good wind for flying kites.

So if God closes one door, look for another. Don't try and break it down but God has something else in mind. And I've learned that that's a great way to live. To just let God open doors, let God shut doors and that takes a lot of pressure off.

God said, "I have set before thee an open door,"

and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and you've kept my word, and you've not denied my name (3:8).

The church of Philadelphia is the church in the last days and it's not a denomination. There are denominational churches but it is the faithful church that has been and has kept faithful to the teaching of the Word of God. Not too many today but there are those churches that do exist where the pastors teach the Word of God to the people. Faithfully teaching the Word of God. We're not powerful, we're not strong, we're not turning the world upside down, we wish we were, but the Lord said, "You have a little strength." It doesn't mean that we're going to become a great, great power and influence in the world but God's given us a little strength. And the important thing is that we keep His word and not deny His name. The Lord said,

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but they do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee (3:9).

One day, the Jewish people will recognize that their forefathers made the greatest and most tragic mistake in the history of the nation when they failed to recognize that Jesus was the promised Messiah. That will take place during the great tribulation period when the man that they hailed as their Messiah turns out to be the antiChrist. And when he stands in the rebuilt temple declaring that he is God, they will recognize then that they have been deceived and they will turn to Jesus Christ in great numbers. And they will recognize the truth of the church. So the Lord said, "I'll make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

God's love and the love of Jesus Christ for His church today. And in the church there is no nationality. And there should never be any thought of ethnic differences. For in Christ we are all one. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). And that recognition that Jesus loves His church.

Now the Lord promises,

Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (3:10).

It's a reference here to the great tribulation. The majority of the Book of Revelation will deal with the details of the great tribulation period. Many chapters, from chapter six through chapter eighteen of the Book of Revelation, will have details of the events that will take place in just a three-and-a-half year period of time. The last three-and-a-half years before Jesus comes with His church to establish God's kingdom upon the earth.

But the world is going to go through a bloodbath. It will be a time of great tribulation such as the world has never seen before or will ever see again. And as we move through the descriptions here in the book of Revelation, recognizing that John saw all of these in a vision, and because John lived almost 2,000 years ago, the weapons of warfare that have been developed, the means of destroying mankind were totally unknown to John. So as he sees these means of destruction, as he sees these battles, he sees them through the eyes of a man who lived 2,000 years ago who never saw an airplane, who never saw a tank, who never saw the weapons of modern warfare and he

does his best to describe them with things that would be familiar with him at that time.

But as we get into the imagery and the descriptions, we can see how they do apply to many of the modern weapons and modern warfare and even to the atomic and nuclear bombs. And the mass destruction of humanity that is going to take place in this last three-and-a-half years in which God is going to pour out His wrath and His judgment upon this world. As He declares in the fourteenth chapter, For the cup of the indignation of the wrath of God has overflowed and the world will see a time of terror and horror such as never before.

We read of events in history, horrible battles, horrible atrocities, horrible massacres, but nothing has taken place in history that can match what's going to happen in the future when God's wrath is poured out upon the earth. We read about it, the wrath of God poured out upon the world in the time of Noah, in the great flood and the destroying of all of the people who lived upon the earth. We read about it in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah when God rained fire and brimstone from heaven. We read about it in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus, in Josephus' *The Wars and the Antiquities of the Jews*, horrible things. The atrocities that took place, but nothing in history to equal what's going to come. But the blessed hope that Jesus gives to the church of Philadelphia is because "you have kept the word of my patience, I will keep you from that hour of temptation that is coming to try those who dwell upon the earth."

When the Bible speaks of the great tribulation, when the Bible speaks of the wrath of God that's to be poured out, it always distinguishes that it is to be poured out upon the wicked, upon the ungodly. As Paul said in Romans 1, "For the wrath of God shall be revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and the ungodliness of men, who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

To the church Jesus promised, "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I will keep you from this hour of temptation." In Luke 21 when the disciples had asked Jesus to give them the signs that would precede the destruction of the temple and the signs that would precede His coming and the end of the age, Jesus told them how they would see Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman army. And how that they should flee from Jerusalem. But then He began to talk to them about the signs of His second coming and He told of this great tribulation. He told of the horrible things that will be happening, the cataclysmic events. Not only just world wars, not only just man against man with modern type of weapons destroying humanity. But He also talked about cataclysmic events in nature. Fierce winds, earthquakes shaking the world in divers or different places. And He spoke of other events, pestilences, and of course we know that pestilences always follow the mass destruction and earthquakes.

Right now one of the big problems with all of the refugees coming out of Kosovo is the sanitation problems and the problems of diseases that are in the refugee camps and all because of the lack of sanitation facilities. But also there will be events in the skies themselves as the moon turns into blood and the sun into darkness. That could be, of course, as the result of the destruction by the atomic weapons. When you think of when Saddam Hussein left Kuwait and turned the oil fields on fire, the smoke and all, how that it darkened the whole countryside. And of course, you look at the moon at night and it takes on an interesting reddish color.

God tells of these events that are going to take place but He promises His church, "Because you've kept the word of My patience, I will also keep you from [not in but from] this hour that is coming to try men who dwell upon the earth."

Behold, I come quickly (3:11):

That didn't mean that He was coming in a month from when he wrote this. It means that the events will be something that will be shortly or will be of short duration. Paul tells us that, "I show you a mystery; We're not all of us going to die, but we'll all of us be changed. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). And that's what's quickly, it's going to happen fast without any notice, just all of a sudden, in a twinkling of an eye, the Lord's going to catch His church out. No time for repentance. No time to call out to God. No time to plead for mercy at that time. It will all be over before you realize what happened. That's why it's important to be ready at all times. So, "I come quickly:"

hold that fast which you have, let no man take thy crown (3:11).

Paul said, "I have fought a good fight, I've finished the course, I've kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, our righteous judge, shall give: but not to me only, but to all those that do love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8). So the Lord speaks about His coming. And at His appearing, those that love His appearing, the crown of righteousness that will be given unto us. "Let no man take thy crown."

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (3:12,13).

As we move along further in the Book of Revelation, we'll get a description of the new city of Jerusalem and we'll discuss it at that time. And the size of the city and all and I'll give you what my understanding of this will be. We'll wait until we get there.

Now unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness (3:14),

Jesus here describes Himself as the faithful and true witness. What does that mean? Jesus is a true witness of God. That is, if you want to know what God is like, you can look at Jesus and understand and know exactly what God is like. For "in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the same was in the beginning with God. And all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3). And later on in discussions with the Jews, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). And then even later on yet when Philip said, Lord, just show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied. Jesus said, Have I been so long a time with you, and yet have you not seen Me, Philip? he that has seen Me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou then, Show us the Father" (John 14:8,9)?

He was a faithful witness of what God is. His life was a witness to us of what God is. Now it is interesting that the Lord calls us to be His witnesses. It should be that men would be able to know what Jesus Christ is like by looking at our lives. And in those areas where our lives are not a true reflection of Jesus, we are not true witnesses. But what an obligation to be His witnesses. And of course, we can only do it through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be witnesses unto Me" (Acts 1:8), Jesus said. But you can't do it apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit. But Jesus, "the faithful and the true witness,"

and He is the beginning of the creation of God (3:14);

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. All things were made by Him. And so He was the beginning or in the beginning in the creation of God.

I know thy works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (3:15,16).

It is interesting that today, Laodicea is just ruins. You really can't get close to even the ruins. There are fences. But it's just out in the field and you can see where the building were but there at the roadside, you can see these two sluices that used to bring water to Laodicea. It's out there in the plains and there was no supply of water there so they built these sluices to bring the water from the mountains that were nearby. There were two of them because one brought cold water, ice cold water that came from the snow and beside it there was another sluice that brought hot water from a hot water spring. That hot water spring is still existing today, the Turks are now using it for power sources. It's extremely hot. In some places it just comes out as steam from the ground. But by the time it came the five miles or so from the springs, it had become lukewarm.

When you are really thirsty and you go to get a drink of water, I don't know about you but I like it to be ice cold. On a hot day, nothing is more refreshing to me than ice cold water. Now some people like hot water. Some people like ice cold water. Very few people like lukewarm water. But such was the case of the church in Laodicea. They were neither hot nor cold. They were lukewarm. They weren't on fire for the Lord. They still went to church. They hadn't totally become apostate. But their position was, Well, I can take it or leave it kind of a

thing. But Jesus doesn't want a take-it-or-leave-it relationship with you. He wants a full right on relationship with you.

And Jesus said, "Because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. You're insipid. Not interested in just a lukewarm relationship. Sort of like that song they used to sing about the ricochet baby. *I don't want a ricochet baby. I don't want a ricochet love. If you want to be a ricochet baby, you'll not be my turtle dove. I don't want to be a ricochet baby. No, no, not me. If you want to be a ricochet baby, I'll set you free.*

But the Lord says basically that. If you want to be a ricochet baby, I'll set you free. I would that you were hot or cold. But because you're lukewarm, I'll spew you out of my mouth.

Because you say (3:17),

And here's an interesting thing and I think it's of vital importance. They were saying and thinking one thing about themselves. The Lord was saying and thinking something totally different. And what is important is not what I think about myself but what the Lord thinks about me. That's what's important! And they were thinking of themselves in one light, God was seeing them in another light. It's important that we see ourselves in the light of God. That's why David said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, know my thoughts: Put them to the test. See if there's some way of wickedness within me, and then, Lord, lead me in your way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23,24).

So here the Lord says, "You say,"

I am rich, I'm increased with goods, I have need of nothing (3:17);

It is the modern apostate church. So many of them have great foundations by which the church is supported. They have become very wealthy. The Mormon church brags to be one of the wealthiest organizations in the world. We're rich. We have need of nothing. We're increased with goods. And of course, all of the properties and all. The Catholic church, rich, need of nothing. All of the properties they hold. But the Lord said,

You don't know that in reality you're wretched, you're miserable, you're poor, and you're blind, and you're naked (3:17):

You're stripped. You have nothing. You're wretched. You're miserable. This is how God viewed them. What a contrast with how they saw themselves. And so the Lord said,

I counsel thee to buy of me gold that is tried in the fire, that you may be rich; white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with an eyesalve, that you may see (3:18).

Interestingly enough, Laodicea was the center of a pharmaceutical firm in history that used some of the clay that was in nearby Hierapolis. You go to Hierapolis today and the whole mountainside looks to be covered with snow but it is sort of a white clay that is in the water that comes tumbling over the rocks. It's quite interesting. And they claim a medical type of value in this white rock. They made a salve out of it, mixed it with some spikenard, and it was sold all over the world as an eyesalve for people. It was looked upon as sort of one of those medical wonders in the ancient world. It was interesting that more recently, they have tested the eyesalve and they found that there's no medicinal value in it at all. But yet it was sold around the world. And here the Lord says, Buy of Me the eyesalve. They have been selling eyesalve to people but there was no true value in it. And so Jesus is counseling them to "anoint your eyes with eyesalve that you may see."

Spiritually they were blind. And unfortunately that is true of so many people today, they are spiritually blind. They are blindly following blind leaders. The apostate church today, there are many, many, many churches that have hired homosexual or lesbian pastors. There are many churches where there is a total denial of the Bible as the Word of God, the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the denial of the atoning work of Jesus Christ and you wonder, Why do they even exist? Well they exist because they have been left great fortunes and they have these large endowments and so they can pay a handsome salary and the people are blind to their spiritual condition.

It is interesting at this point when this church is in such a tragic state, Jesus said,

As many as I love, I rebuke and I chasten: be zealous (3:19)

And the word zealous is with heat. You hear of the heat of passion. “Be zealous,” *therefore, and repent (3:19).*

The Lord still loves and He is chastening them in order to bring them to repentance. In Hebrews you remember he said, “Don’t despise the chastening of the Lord. For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:5,6). And so the Lord speaks of the chastening and is calling them to a zealousness and to repentance.

So in a sense, we come more or less to the end of the church history in this church, the Laodicean church. Where do you find the Lord? He’s outside knocking at the door.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (3:20).

You see, salvation is an individual matter. If any man--You’re not saved by a religious system. You’re not saved by a church. You’re saved by a personal experience with Jesus Christ. Knowing at the door of your heart. Seeking entrance into your life. Seeking deep, intimate fellowship with you. “I will sup with him.” That is, I will have supper with him.

It is interesting that in that culture in the days of John and the disciples, to eat with someone signified the deepest and the most intimate kind of a relationship that you could have. You’re sharing the same food. You’re sharing in reality the same germs because they didn’t have plates and knives and forks and all sanitized out there. They had these bowls of salads and soup in the middle of the table. They had this flat round bread that they would pass around. You pull off a piece, give it to the person next to you. They’d pull off a piece. And then you start dipping it in the salads or in the soups. And you find that even today in the culture over there among the Bedouins. There’s no rules that you can’t dip twice. So by the time the meal is over, you’ve shared the food, you’ve shared the salads, you’ve shared the germs. You really are one with each other. If you’ve had a cold, I’ve got your cold. We’re one. And it really signified that to them. Becoming one.

That’s why they were so shocked when Jesus ate with sinners and publicans. They made note of that. They said, He eats with sinners and publicans. Because it signified becoming one with them. That’s why the Jew would never eat with a Gentile. Never. Because it meant to become one with the Gentile.

Now Jesus wants that close intimate fellowship with you. He wants to become one with you. He wants to eat supper with you. He said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man will hear My voice, and open the door.” Notice He didn’t say, I’ll crash it in. If you don’t open, I’ll huff and puff and blow your house down. No. If you hear my voice and open the door.

In the Holman’s picture of Christ knocking at the door—you’ve probably seen that picture, it’s a beautiful picture though I’m not really one for pictures of Jesus, he’s done a great job—and when his friends came to observe the painting that he made, one of his friends said, Well, you’ve left something out. There’s no door handle there on the door. And Holman said, No, I didn’t leave that out by accident. That was deliberate. You see, the handle’s on the inside.

And so it is as the Lord knocks at your heart, the handle’s, you’ve got to open the door. “And if any man will open the door, I will come in.” What a glorious thing. Jesus said that “He who comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). If you open the door, He said, I will come in. You say, My house is so filthy. It’s so dirty. You don’t know the filth in my house. The Lord said, I’ll come in. And the beautiful thing is He’ll help you clean it up. I’ll come in, sup with him and he with Me. And then the promise,

To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (3:21).

Today, Jesus is sitting at the throne of God in heaven. And He gives the offer to those that would be overcomers, that they would be able to share and sit with Him on His throne, even as He sits with His Father in his throne.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (3:22).

Father, we ask that You would help us to give heed to the things which have been spoken, lest at any time,

we should drift away. Become cold, indifferent, lukewarm. Light a fire in our hearts, Lord. Let us burn in our zeal for You and in our love for You. Work Your work, Lord, in each of our hearts and lives this day. And Lord, help us to keep the word of Your patience that we might be kept from the great tribulation. Help us, Lord, to remain true to the Word. Help us, Lord, to buy from You gold that's tried in the fire that we might be rich. Lord, make us the church You would have us to be. Help us to do the things You would have us to do as Your church. Guide, Lord, the affairs of this church for we recognize that Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, His church. And thus, we want to submit to You in every decision, in every matter that involves the church. That You will be in control and that You will guide, Lord, according to Your desires and Your wishes, for we wish to be obedient servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.