

The Lord's Word to His Church: Laodicea

Scripture: Revelation 3:14–22

Code: 90-478

Tonight, we are wrapping up our look at Revelation 1, 2, and 3. There are seven letters, starting in chapter 2 and ending at the end of chapter 3. These are actual towns, cities in ancient Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. They are churches that were established there under the influence of the church at Ephesus. A period of time from Ephesus, the Word of God, the gospel, sounded out throughout all Asia Minor, Acts tell us in chapter 19 and verse 10. And as the Word of God spread throughout Asia Minor, it spread along the main roads, the postal route, from city to city to city; and these seven churches were established. They are seven actual churches, historical churches, that have been in existence about 30 years or so by the time the Lord has this set of letters sent to them, embedded in the book of Revelation, which He gave to John on the Isle of Patmos, and then distributed to the church by representatives from those churches who came to John and took back the book of Revelation and the letters.

Laodicea is the final church mentioned here, and the last church on the postal route. Among these seven churches, five of them are highly disappointing. Five of them are so disappointing that they are threatened with judgment. Ephesus was on the brink of judgment because it had left its first love, even though it was still doctrinally strong. Pergamos was on the brink of judgment because it was tolerating sin. While not yet denying the faith, it was still tolerating sin. Thyatira entered into a full-blown compromise with evil, to the degree that within the church itself, sin was being advocated. Sardis was dead. There was virtually no spiritual life there at all, even though there were a few genuine believers.

And now we come to Laodicea. This is a completely unsaved church. This is a church of nonbelievers. Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only church to which Christ says nothing good about anybody – unsparing condemnation; no redeeming feature. This is the false church, the unregenerate church, the unredeemed church. This is beyond Sardis. Sardis virtually was dead as a church, as a testimony, but there was still a few believers there. Not in this case. This is the most threatening, rebuking letter yet. And the amazing this is Laodicea was a proud church – proud and unconverted. Let's hear what the Lord says to this church, chapter 3 and verse 14:

“To the angel of the church, or the messenger of the church, in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and have become

wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

This is a long letter, relatively speaking, and so we want to look at it carefully. Let's begin with the writer of the letter who is introduced in the opening verse, verse 14: “To the messenger who will take this letter back to Laodicea write the words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. It is He who says this.” The Lord is writing this letter, and He introduces Himself in each case, in all of these seven letters, by references to His deity, references to His identity. Here, three things are said about Him: He is the Amen, He is the faithful and true Witness, He is the Beginning of the creation of God.

Let me just have you look at those for a moment. “The Amen,” what does that mean? This is a unique title, and actually may reflect a Hebrew thought, because back in Isaiah 65:16, we read this phrase: “The God of Amen, the God of Amen.” What does amen mean? We say it; some of you said it today, tonight. What does it mean? We sing amen; what are we saying?

The word amen is often used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement. It is an affirmation. It is a kind of verbal guarantee that what has been said is true. It is essentially the same at the end as putting “verily” at the beginning. We read many times in the New Testament, “Verily, verily, I say unto you,” and then the Lord goes on to say something. Verily at the beginning of a statement affirms the statement that is about to be made; and amen at the end of a statement seals its veracity and its certainty.

Our Lord is the firm, fixed, certain, faithful, unchangeable Amen, because He is true all the time, in every way; and specifically because all that He says is true, and all that He promises is true, and all His covenants are true; and He Himself is the guarantee and affirmation. Christ, in fact, is the Amen to God's promises. He is the Amen to God's covenants.

Second Corinthians 1:20 says, “For all the promises of God in Him, in Christ, are yes; and in Him, Amen unto the glory of God. God's promises are then validated in Christ. They are made certain in Christ. He is God's Amen, the One who confirms all divine promises. This, of course, is to establish His glory, and His truthfulness, and His unity with God.

Secondly, He is the faithful and true Witness. This further elucidates the Amen. Not only does he validate what God has said and what God has promised, but whatever He says is true, whatever He affirms is true. If He speaks, it is faithful and true. He is completely trustworthy. He is perfectly accurate. He is reliable. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the perfect Witness – all testimony which He bears to God, to the character of God, to the purposes of God, the plans of God, the promises of God, the covenants of God. All that He says is a faithful Witness.

John, chapter 3 and verse 31: “He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set His seal to this, that God is true.”

When Christ speaks on behalf of God, His testimony is absolutely true. Jesus is then the Amen of God; the living verification and validation and confirmation of every promise God ever made, every plan God ever established, every covenant He set. Beyond that, everything He Himself says, everything Himself does is sincere and true. This establishes at the very beginning in dealing with this church, that truth is critical. Truth is the necessary foundation.

Then, thirdly, He identifies Himself in verse 14 as the Beginning of the creation of God. The English there is frankly ambiguous. That ambiguity disappears when we read the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 1 and verse 15 concerning Christ. “He is the image of the invisible God.” He is the *protokos* of all creation. That means not necessarily the first who was ever created, but the premier one of all creation. More than that: “By Him, all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body of the church. He is the beginning, the primary one from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.”

Christ is the everything of God. All that God is, He is. He is the Creator. He is the Author of life, both spiritual life and physical life. So when it says, “He is the Beginning of the creation of God,” we can interpret as the primary One. He is the Source of all creation. John tells us in chapter 1 that “everything that was made, was made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” He is the *arch*, the leader, the premier one.

Now, why is this important to establish in a letter to Laodicea? Why all of this about the deity of Christ as the Creator? It sounds like Colossians. Why all of this? Why the establishment that Christ is the affirmation of all of God’s promises, that He Himself is true, and that He is the Creator? Why all of this?

It might help you to know that Laodicea was ten miles from Colossae. There were three cities in that area: Hierapolis, Colossae, and Laodicea. Colossae was only ten miles away, and it is very likely that what plagued Colossae found its way to Laodicea. If you read the book of Colossians, you will find that Paul writes that book to answer those who were denying the deity of Christ.

Christological heresy had infiltrated Colossae. It had attacked particularly the deity of Christ and reduced Him to a created being, some kind of angelic being. No doubt, the heresies concerning the person of Christ had found their way to this neighboring city of Laodicea, because here is a church that is lost. Here is a church that is unconverted.

Here is a church that in large measure, no doubt, has been exposed to and bought into the very heresies that poisoned Laodicea. That is why in Colossians 4:16, Paul says this: "Read this letter in the church of the Laodiceans. Read this letter in the church of the Laodiceans, and then read my letter from them in your church."

Well, what was going on in Colossae apparently had found its way to Laodicea. And because they had a heretical view of Christ, they were an unsaved church. They didn't believe that Christ was the *arch*, the Beginner, the Originator, the Initiator, the Creator of life and all that existed. They didn't believe that. They didn't believe that He was the Alpha and the Omega as Revelation introduces Him.

To be the Alpha, He had to be the Creator. To be the Omega, He had to be the Consummator. He is the Supreme One, the Sovereign One, the One who created everything that exists and everyone who exists. He is the uncreated source of creation. So the Lord who created everything, the faithful and true Witness to the Word of God, the One in whom all spiritual promises are fulfilled says this.

So here is the offended Lord, offended by heretical views of Him. And I would just remind you historically speaking, this is what makes a church a Laodicean church. It is an unconverted church because it has a warped view of Christ. You could be talking about the Mormon church. You could be talking about liberal churches that deny the deity of Christ, as they universally do; mainline denominational churches.

Here is, at the very outset, a powerful Christological statement that demonstrates to us that the church at Laodicea had erred in their view of Christ. And if you have a wrong view of Christ, it has horrendous spiritual effects – as we will see.

It will also help us to understand a little bit about the city of Laodicea. It's located in the Lycus River Valley in southwest Phrygia. It's the most easterly city of the seven cities, about forty-five miles away from Philadelphia. Its sister cities were Colossae and Hierapolis. Colossae's about ten miles away, and Hierapolis is only about six miles away.

The Lycus Valley was one of the most common routes of travel because people didn't travel in the mountains, they traveled in the valleys. And Laodicea was an important city. It not only was a place where travel was going east to west, it was even a place where travel was going north to south, and so it was an intersection city. Antiochus II founded the city in the third century before Christ and named it for his wife. Laodice was his wife's name. He named it for her and then divorced her; but the name stuck. The modern name of the Turkish city is Eski-hassar, which means in Turkish "the old fortress."

Now, at the time of that, our Lord writes to it. We understand from history that it had a very large Jewish population, a very large Jewish population. Some interesting history about that. How do we know that? Because each year, the Jews had to pay a temple tax. If you were a male over 21 – this was universally true of the Jews – they paid a tax to the temple in Jerusalem of half a shekel. Made a reference to that even in the gospels.

In 62 B.C., Flaccus, the governor, put a stop to any exporting of gold from Laodicea. He wouldn't allow Laodiceans to send gold out, and the Jews always paid their shekel temple tax with gold. He needed it to back the currency. The Jews always sent their tax in a lump package of gold. They came together in their synagogues in the city, and compiled all their money and turned it into gold, and sent the gold to Jerusalem. They were forbidden to do it, but they did it anyway. They disregarded the order of the governor.

It was confiscated, and historians say it weighed twenty pounds. Twenty pounds of gold with all the males paying half a shekel, you can see it had almost 4,000 males; and then you would have the wives and others. So there were thousands of Jews living there. They were in the middle of this pagan culture with all of its mixed morality. There's some indications in the Talmud that they were lax in their Judaism, and engulfed by the paganism.

Now, some other features of the city that play a very important role in this letter. First of all, crucial to any city and to this city in particular, was its water supply. Population grew because it was a hub; and it got larger and larger, and the local streams were no longer able to supply the necessary water. So there had to be built an amazing, amazing aqueduct, an underground aqueduct. They put it underground so that enemies wouldn't have access to it.

One historian says that they could not use the Lycus or the Meander River because they were too dirty. Besides, the Lycus River often dried up during the dry season. Most of the springs in the area are hot springs full of gasses and other chemicals. And, by the way, Hierapolis was a place of hot springs – still is today – and people went there for the healing properties of the hot springs.

The Laodiceans had no choice. They had to pipe in water from a distant spring through twin lines of stone pipe. Each stone was about three feet across and hollowed through the middle. The water carried by these pipes was so charged with impurities that it dropped much of its load in the flow – the calcium carbonate gradually clogging the pipes. The water was collected in a central water tower and then distributed through the streets by pipes radiating from the central water tower.

The water tower in the sections of the terracotta pipes are still visible today. It is evidence, says this writer, at least that the water carried in through the pipes was bad, for thick deposits of calcareous impurities can still be seen almost choking the surviving section of the pipes. Some archeologists have suggested that the pipes came from five miles away; and so as they went, they both deposited and accumulated this calcareous impurity. This, from an interesting journal article written in the fall of 1991.

There's a second thing that dominated this city, and that was a great commercial enterprise of banking. The city was very wealthy. It was so wealthy that after the earthquake of 60 A.D. which leveled this city and some of the others in the area, the people of Laodicea prided themselves on rejecting an offer of financial help from Rome because they had enough money of their own to completely rebuild a beautiful city without any help. Tacitus wrote: "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources with no help from us," a Roman historian.

Another thing that Laodicea was famous for was the wool industry. The major product being a soft wool, glossy black in color. It was used for carpets and it was used for clothing, both locally and then exported.

The city also gained much respect and honor for its medical school. A medical school was established in connection with a temple to an ancient god of healing, later identified as Asclepius. We see him in Corinth as well. Famous medical teachers were there and they developed a famous and highly-valued salve to be used for eye ailments. So there was the essence of commercial Laodicea: finance, black wool, and eye salve. All three industries play a part in this letter, and so does the water supply.

This is a wealthy, self-sufficient city. That attitude found its way into the church, and the heresy concerning the nature of Christ found its way into the church; and so soon after the church was founded, it is a church of nonbelievers, because salvation doesn't come to those who have the wrong Christ. There's no record about the founding of this church. But in Colossians, chapter 1, we read that Epaphras evangelized the Lycus Valley region, so maybe he was the one the Lord used to found it.

In Colossians 4, we read about Archippus being a leader there, and he is mentioned in Philemon in chapter 2 in connection with Philemon, the slave owner. Maybe he was a leader there. We don't know the details about it; but by reading Colossians and looking between Colossians and Revelation, we

can put some things together. But most notably, the church had been affected by a devastating heresy.

Apparently, Paul was never actually there, but he knew some of the believers there, because in chapter 2 of Colossians he refers to believers in Laodicea; and again in chapter 4. It had a long history, but a very sad history. It started out with life, spiritual life; was soon corrupted, unregenerate. Sardis was dead, but it had a few living, worthy believers. Thyatira was compromising sinful and idolatrous, but it had some who held to love and the truth. Laodicea is a church that is not a church. It is the first church of the tares; there's no wheat. There is no commendation at all.

Look at verse 15: "I know your deeds," that's all it says, "I know your deeds." And there are none to commend, so there is no commendation. "I know your deeds." Of course, He knows, of course.

We saw that back in chapter 1, the sovereign, penetrating gaze of Christ knows everything. "I know your deeds, and all your deeds – universally, collectively – lead to a devastating, severe rebuke –" in verse 15 " – that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." That is the most strong statement the Lord has made yet to a church. "You make me vomit. I know you. I know what you are. You make me sick. You are lukewarm."

What may well lie behind that statement, that lukewarm, is the reality of what I talked about a little earlier. Nearby were the hot waters of Hierapolis, famous for their healing powers – still used today. People went there because they were good, because they had properties of rehabilitation and restoration. And in Colossae, there were cold waters. There was a cold perennial stream, which made it the earliest settlement in the area; and the water was refreshing, clear.

Contrast to those, there was the dirty, foul, tepid water that flowed for miles through a filthy aqueduct. It wasn't hot enough to relax or restore. It wasn't cool enough to quench. It was foul, and it made people nauseous. That's what our Lord's saying about this church: "You make Me sick."

One writer said, "The water supply of Laodicea was derived from artificial pipeline, bringing water which was literally lukewarm and so impure as to have an emetic effect. What is an emetic? A substance that makes you vomit. What is the spiritual significance of this? The Lord is simply saying, "You make Me sick."

Some churches make the Lord sick. He was angry with those that compromised. He was disappointed with those that left their first love, those that compromised with sin. But this church made Him sick. It made Him sick.

What we have to do is import that through church history down to today – churches full of people who have a wrong view of Christ, and therefore, are unconverted and unsaved, are obnoxious to heaven. They make the Lord sick; they nauseate Christ. You know, in some ways, there's always hope for a church that has some believers in it; and that's why the letters to the churches where there's some believers calls for a repentance, and maybe things can change.

But there's nothing here. There is nothing here to appeal to. Christ isn't even in this church. This is the worst of all possible representations of a church. This is just sickening. And I don't think you'd need to turn that into an allegory and decide what hot mean and what cold means, other than to say – He says, “You have no purpose; you just make Me sick.”

So verse 17 adds – and this would be true: “Not only are you sickening hypocrites, but you are deceived, as all sickening hypocrites are. You say one thing and you don't know your true condition. You say, ‘I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” One thing about nonbelievers who have come together in a “church” is they're in no position to assess their spiritual condition. They cannot know reality.

Laodicea was a wealthy city: wealthy in material wealth, famous for its banking, for its riches. And the church's opinion of its own identity, was a baseless fiction that somehow they possessed not only material wealth, but even spiritual wealth. Maybe they were not only those who denied the deity of Christ, but maybe they had been influenced by a source of that kind of denial – Gnosticism, sort of pre-Gnosticism. Maybe they met together in spiritual pride thinking they were the elevated people.

That was what Gnosticism and pre-Gnosticism was – comes from the Greek word “to know,” the people who had the secret elevated knowledge. They had the money, they had the riches; they saw themselves as transcending to *hoi polloi*, to a kind of knowledge that was above everybody else; a spiritual pride to go along with their material pride. They say, “I'm rich. I have become wealthy. I have need of nothing.”

That is the worst state a person can be in. It would be better, it would be better to be an atheist. It would be better to be completely ignorant of the church and the gospel. Anything would be better than this. This is the ultimate apostate hypocrisy: you know about Christ and you've created a false Christ, you know about God and you've created a false god, and you're smugly self-confident in that.

This characterizes entire denominations across the world in an American history, even up to today. This characterizes “Christian universities and seminaries.” They think they're rich materially, they think they're rich in spiritual knowledge, they have the elevated knowledge, and they don't know their condition – the condition that comes to anybody who has a wrong view of Christ. When the major denominations began to attack the deity of Christ, it was clear evidence that Laodicea had become

the norm.

I had the opportunity to do a book review while I was over in Scotland, and Iain Murray gave me a book and asked if I would review it was featuring the idea that it was sad for people to have to leave the Church of Scotland. They finally had come – some people had come to the conclusion they had to leave the Church of Scotland; and what triggered that was same-sex marriage and the ordination of homosexuals.

So I read the book, and it's really well done. And good people wrote the book, good people, faithful people. But my response to the book was this: "You didn't leave when they denied the Bible. You didn't leave when they denied the deity of Christ. Now you're leaving over same-sex marriage? You're going to be accused of making that the high ground, and you're going to reinforce the idea that Christians are just people who have a different set of social morals. How could you stay when they denied the inspiration and authority of Scripture? How could you stay when they denied the deity of Christ; and now you leave? I'm glad you leave, but I think it's going to be misunderstood, it's going to be misunderstood."

Once they deny Scripture and deny Christ, it's Laodicea. "You don't know – " He says " – that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Look, there's nothing you can do with those words to make them Christians. Christians are not wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. So when you're asking, "Who are these people?" these are non-Christians in a church, a church of non-Christians, the sickening condition of thinking you're spiritually rich, when you're bankrupt; of thinking you're beautiful, when you're wretched; of imagining that you're to be envied, when you're to be pitied; of believing you see everything clearly, when you see nothing and are stone blind; feeling you are clothed in spiritual finery, when you're naked. You may have your bank account, you may wear your black wool, you may have your eye salve; but spiritually, you are miserable, wretched, poor, blind, and naked, and you are to be most pitied. You have no riches with God, you wear no robes of righteousness, you see no spiritual reality, and you don't know it.

That is the condition of a church of nonbelievers. In reality, those kinds of churches, even today, are the proudest of churches. They are the proudest of churches. They think they're rich, they think they're clothed in finery, they think they don't need anything: they have no idea of their condition.

At that point, our Lord speaks to them in verses 18 to 20. His message is very direct. "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see."

Here is grace offered to hypocrites. Not surprising, is it, that the Lord would offer grace to hypocrites: “To buy from Me.” Like Isaiah 55:1, right? “Come, without money and without price, and buy. You think you can buy anything you want, you’ve got it all, you need nothing. What you really need only comes from Me. Come. Come to Me and buy, without price, without money, without works.”

“What shall a man profit if he – ” what? “ – gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” “If you want riches, come to Me. If you want clothing, come to Me. If you want sight, come to Me. Come to Me, and I’ll give you gold refined by fire,” pure gold, no impurities. This refers to all spiritual blessings, all spiritual wealth that is pure and priceless, and it all comes from Me. All spiritual blessings in the heavenlies come from Me.”

“True faith – ” in 1 Peter 1:7 “ – is more precious than gold which is perishable, even though it’s tested by fire, it’s found ultimately to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

“Come to Me and buy the true and tested gold so you will not be poor anymore. And then come to Me to receive a white garment that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed. Get rid of your black robe, and come and get a white robe,” which in the book of Revelation several times is the righteousness of the saints, the imputed righteousness of God placed over the saints. And the word white here is *leukos*: dazzling, brilliant, like the white of a lightbulb, not like a white cloth. This is the robe of righteousness of Isaiah 61:10 that covers the sinner.

“And then since you’re blind, come and take the eye salve that I have, and I’ll anoint your eyes so that you can see.” Apparently that eye salve was a kind of coarse dough that they put together, and they mixed in it some Phrygian power that had demonstrated that it had some kind of soothing affect on eyes that had been irritated. Obviously, it’s not going to correct vision. But it was salve that helped heal wounds that had come to the eye.

“Come to Me, I’ll make you see. Come to Me, I’ll cover you in a white garment. Come to Me, I’ll make you rich.” So just as poor, naked, blind unbelievers have no idea of what their condition is, our Lord says, “Take this letter and read it to them.”

Salvation is that gold which makes us spiritually rich in faith. It is that white robe that covers our sinful nakedness with the righteousness of God through Christ. It is that eye salve which gives us the knowledge of God, illuminating grace and an understanding of God’s truth. This is a call to salvation in a three-fold description, and it is a magnificent picture. “Come, the price has been paid. Buy without money and without price,” Isaiah 55:1. “Come. Come.”

And then in verse 19 He says something interesting: “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent.” That first statement has caused some people to think He’s talking to Christians here, but the context doesn’t allow that. This is just an axiomatic statement about God and about Christ. “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline,” which is no different than to say this: “God so loved the – ” what? “ – world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”

God does reprove and rebuke unbelievers. You’re going to see that in John, chapter 16: “He convicts the world, through the Holy Spirit, of sin and righteousness and judgment.” And by the way, the word “reprove” there is to treat with contempt, to convict, Matthew 18:15, “to expose.”

“He loves the world, and He exposes the sin of the world, and He reproves it, and He even punishes it.” The word “discipline” here is used in Luke 23 twice at it referred to punishment.

Second Timothy 2:25, it’s used with regard to unbelievers. He loves unbelievers, He loves sinners, that’s why we have ceased to be sinners and been given salvation. And that love demonstrated, starts with reproof. It’s starts with unmasking our wretchedness. It starts with punishment.

There’s a note of tenderness in these words, as there is in the whole letter. He has a tender affection for these people. It’s *phile*. He doesn’t love them with an *agape* kind of love, He loves them with a divine kind of affection, but no relationship. But He’s saying, “You’re on the edge of conviction and exposure and punishment, and God finds no pleasure in such punishment.”

So He says, “Therefore, be zealous and repent.” That’s a call to salvation: Repent, repent – a decisive act; a zealous, eager act. Do it with all your might. Do it with all your heart. Repent.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote on repentance: “Repentance means that you realize that you’re a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, and that you are hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, and that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form; you renounce the world, whatever the cost – the world in its mind and outlook, as well as its practice – and you deny yourself, and take up the cross, and go after Christ, your nearest and dearest. And the whole world may call you a fool or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference: that is repentance. Repentance is only going to come if you realize you’re not rich, and you’re not wealthy and in need of nothing.

The message to the unsaved church is, “Repent and do it fast. Pursue repentance with zeal.” And it is that general, divine affection expressed in the *phileó* love of that verse that is behind this reproof. And the invitation in verse 20 is one of the most familiar in all the Bible, one of the most misunderstood. This is compassion. This is divine mercy.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” Who is He talking about? Himself. The door of what? Not the door of your heart, the door of the church, right? “I stand at the door of your church and I knock. Is there anyone who will hear My voice and open the door? I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me.” This is a church that Christ is not in.

Popular idea, I understand that, we’ve heard that all our lives knocking on the heart. That’s not the picture here. This is the door of the church metaphorically speaking. Christ says, “I will come in to your church.”

In the church at Sardis, He was there in the presence of the few that were believers. He’s outside this church. There are thousands of churches like this – thousands, tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands around the world – and Christ is outside. And in compassion He knocks, shut out of church that bears His name.

I go by so many of these dead, liberal churches, and Christ is in the name of the church, but He’s not in the church. The knocking in this letter is Christ saying, “I will come in if someone, anyone, anyone hears My voice, meaning: the assessment of the spiritual condition that I have just described and is willing to repent with zeal, if someone will open the door and be saved, I’ll come into that church.” And that’s all it takes, folks, one true Christian in a church and Christ is there. He may not be in control.

The act of saving faith that rejects works, recognizing spiritual bankruptcy, spiritual nakedness, and spiritual blindness; abandoning self-righteousness, works, and self-sufficiency, turning from sin and opening the door. If it’s just one, He will enter the church. Salvation will come inside that church: “And I’ll dine with that person: – fellowship, communion, shared life, shared joy, closeness, affection, intimacy.”

A shared meal was a symbol of union. A shared meal was a symbol of fellowship. This is *deipnon*, the evening meal, the last one of the day that lasted a long time before night fell. Jesus is saying, “If somebody – somebody in Laodicea, somebody - will come and open the door, I’ll come in and I’ll save you, and I’ll have fellowship with you.”

This is one final plea, one last plea. So our Lord stands knocking on the door of Laodicea. He’s still there outside these churches; still there in the cold, in the dark, knocking on the door of sickening, unsaved churches, seeking entrance before eternal night falls and it is everlastingly too late, too late.

There’s a wonderful story about a woman theologian named Lindemann – you remember the story, I know it’s deep – who was a Christ-denying, Scripture-denying liberal scholar. And by the grace of God – and, of course, a part of a church that was no church, a church where Christ was outside. But she opened the door, Christ came in and saved her – very rare – in the midst of liberalism. And she

had written books and books and books, denying Christ, scholastic books denying Scripture. And after Christ came in, people asked her, “What do we do with your books?” Her famous answer is this: “Throw them away like I did; they’re worthless.”

And then a final promise, verse 21: “He who overcomes.” What is it that overcomes? First John 5:5, our faith: “He who overcomes – ” our faith “ – if you will believe, I will not only come in and sit down with you and fellowship with you now, but I will grant to that person who comes in faith to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. I’ll take you all the way to glory and sit you on My throne.”

We saw in chapter 1 that He has a throne, and we know God has a throne. The throne of God and the throne of Christ becomes the throne of the penitent believer. This is the supreme elevation to humanity, to have the dignity of sitting on the throne of God and the throne of Christ. We don’t receive a kind of minimal salvation. He knocks on the church that is not church. He calls for the people who are not Christians to repent. “And if they do – ” He says, “I’ll come in and I’ll linger with you, and I’ll be present with you and will commune and have fellowship. And someday, I will take you and seat you on My throne – the throne of My Father and My throne.”

That’s the message to the apostates, to the liberals, to the Christ-deniers, the Bible-deniers, who think they’re the elevated, scholarly, intellectuals who are far above true believers. “You don’t know your condition. You are poor and blind. You are wretched, miserable, naked.” But Christ, in grace, offers salvation.

And, again, as all the letters close, He says, “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Are you listening? Are you listening?

Father, we thank You for what we have seen tonight and through this series. It’s just amazing, amazing, divine insight into the reality of life in the church throughout all history: seven actual towns and actual churches, and yet, consummately put together. Seven of them, symbolizing the completeness, become the pattern of churches we can trace through all of human history, even today.

And again, Lord, we say to You that it’s our desire to be like Smyrna and Philadelphia: faithful – perhaps faithful through persecution; faithful like Smyrna, to suffer persecution and not deny You; faithful like Philadelphia, to keep the door to the kingdom open all the time; and be a church that has the door wide open to usher people into Your glorious kingdom. Keep our church faithful as long, as long as history runs, until Jesus comes: keep this church faithful. May it never be that a letter like this, or any of the other letters of warning and judgment would ever be written to us. Sustain Your work for Your glory in this place.

And, Lord, I pray, as I think about it, for students from the seminary who go all over the country and all over the world, plant churches and pastor churches and train pastors: Lord, I pray that You will keep them faithful. Keep them fully devoted to the truth of Scripture, fully devoted to Christ, loving sound doctrine; and more, loving Christ, uncompromising with the world, intolerant of sin, willing to suffer – always with the door to the kingdom wide open, until Jesus comes; that we may be useful in the work You've called us to; and blessed in faithfulness. These things we ask for the sake of Christ, our Lord, who is the all-glorious, majestic Head of the church. May He be honored in the church, we pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).