**Jesus Promises an Open Door**

July 21, 2019

Revelation 3:1–22

Key Verse 3:8 “I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

We have been studying the seven churches of Asia Minor. Today’s passage covers letters to the last three of the seven churches of Asia Minor. Sardis is known as a dead church. Philadelphia is known as an obedient church. Laodicea is known as a lukewarm church. There is a progression here. There is the loss of first love, and then comes compromise with the world, and the world comes in and sin is accepted, and then the church begins to die – that is the progress. Ultimately, it ends up like Laodicea; it is a church that the Lord will vomit out of his mouth. It is a church that he is not even in, and he is on the outside knocking on the door. But before we get to that final phase, the church in Philadelphia gives a nice break in this tragic progression.

**First**, the church in Sardis. Look at verse 1. “These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” Here Jesus identifies himself in this way because that is exactly what is missing in the church in Sardis. Here is a church without the Holy Spirit. Here is a church with pastors who are not faithful, who do not belong to the Lord. The life and power of the Holy Spirit is not present. Without the Holy Spirit and without godly leadership, the church was dead. The church, by definition, is to be alive. It is a place where God lives, where Christ lives, where the Holy Spirit lives, where believers are alive. They have been given life. A church is to be the fellowship of those who possess eternal life.

Look at verse 2b. “For I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.” Another way to say it would be: Your deeds are not acceptable. Maybe the church in Sardis did some philanthropic works there. Maybe they provided some service to the community such as feeding the homeless. But whatever they did, “Their deeds were not sufficient in the sight of my God.” That is what our Lord says. It is not enough. When it says dead, it means spiritually dead. This is a church full of unconverted people. Today there are churches attended by people and led by people who don’t believe the Bible, don’t believe in Christ, don’t believe the gospel: they are dead churches. You can tell a dead church. It is concerned with tradition. It is concerned with social problems. It is concerned with tolerance of sin. It is concerned with material things, not spiritual things. It doesn’t proclaim the gospel. What kills a church? Sin kills a church. Error kills the church. Compromise kills the church. Little by little, sin kills. When the killing power of sin is brought into the church by receiving in unbelievers, by putting unbelievers in positions of leadership, the church will die.

Look at verses 2-3. “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.” There are five commands: “Wake up; Strengthen; Remember; Hold it fast; Repent.” The first command is “Wake up!” It means, “Assess your condition; look around you. Wake up. Be alert; watch.” Verse 3b says, “If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” Whenever the Lord talk about coming like a thief, it is about judgment. So the first command is to the unbelievers in the congregation: “Wake up before judgment comes. Wake up!” The second and third commands are “strengthen and remember.” “Strengthen what remains and is about to die. Rescue what remains. There is still some hope. Remember what you have received and heard.” To the dead: “Watch, repent.” To the sleeping: “Remember, repent.” To the faithful: “Strengthen, hold on to the truth.” This is amazingly precise careful counsel to people who are believers in a dead church, and the dead people as well.

Even in the dead church like Sardis, there were a few remnants. Look at verse 4. “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.” The people who came with undefiled garments, symbolically speaking, were those who had been cleansed by Christ. They had been covered with the blood of Christ. Revelation 7:14 says, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Jesus promises in verse 5 that the one who is victorious will be dressed in white.” In the case of the church in Sardis, to be victorious means to wake up spiritually, to be cleansed by Jesus and to begin to pursue a close relationship with him. When we do, we can share in his victory. When the Roman army won a battle, there would be a victory parade, and all those who were Roman citizens would put on a white robe to symbolize that they shared in the victory. When we walk with Jesus, dressed in white, it means we share in his victory over sin, over death, over the curse, and over all evil. What happened in Sardis? Several decades after this letter was delivered, there was a revival in Sardis. Some of those who were dead came to life. Some of those who were indifferent remembered the truth that they had heard and strengthened what remained, and held fast to Christ.

**Second**, the church in Philadelphia (7a). Philadelphia means “the city of brotherly love,” because Attalus, the founder of the city had a special love for his brother. How does Jesus introduce himself to the church in Philadelphia? In verse 7 he says, “These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” Jesus has the key of David. The key is the symbol of authority, ultimate control, sovereignty. The key of David then is the ultimate Messianic authority over all the royal riches of heaven. Jesus Christ then is the Holy One, the True One, and the one who has access to all the treasures of heaven, and who pours them out by his own sovereign will on his people. Jesus has complete control of the kingdom and its resources. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) He also said. “I am the door. I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Without Christ, we cannot enter the kingdom. He alone provides entrance for us.

Look at verse 8. “I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” This is the Risen Christ’s word of encouragement to the church in Philadelphia. The saints of the church in Philadelphia had been faithful even though they had little strength. Obviously it was a small church. It was characterized by obedience, loyalty, and one more: endurance, perseverance. They were persevering. Verse 10 says, “since you have kept my command to endure patiently.” This indicates that there was persecution; They were persecuted by the Jews. They were persecuted by the Gentiles. But they had kept the command of the Lord to endure patiently.

I would like to believe with all my heart that our church is like the church in Philadelphia, small but faithful. Philadelphia, because of its obedience, its loyalty, and its endurance, was given some amazing privileges. Look at verse 8 again. “I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.” It means, “I am giving you an open door to the kingdom.” They became a church that was able to usher others through that open door. This open door has implications of gospel opportunity, gospel witness, gospel preaching, evangelistic outreach. Colossians 4:3 says, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ.” That little church no doubt had an open door that those passing through that town on that trade route, and those who lived in that town, were introduced to the gospel, and some of them were ushered through those doors by the grace of God into the kingdom. St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16:9, “because a great door for effective work has opened for me.” So the promise of an open door means that they were a place where people could come to enter the kingdom. God will also give them an open door of opportunity to prosper.

**Third**, the church in Laodicea (14a). Unlike the other churches, Jesus has nothing good to say about the church in Laodicea; he seems to have saved the worst for last; he only rebukes them.

Look at verse 14b. “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” Laodicea was only 10 miles from Colossae. If you read the book of Colossians, you can see that St. Paul battles the heresy that denies the deity of Christ. Apparently this heresy made it into Laodicea. Because they had a heretical view of Christ, they were an unsaved church. They didn’t believe that Christ was the Creator of the universe. They didn’t believe that he was the Alpha and the Omega.

Look at verses 15-16. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” That is the strongest statement the Lord has made yet to a church. “You make me vomit. I know what you are. You make me sick. You are lukewarm.” It is a reference to their water supply. Laodicea had no direct water supply, and so it built aqueducts to bring hot water from the hot springs in Hieropolis and cold water from the Lycus River in Colosse. Hot water in Hieropolis was famous for their healing powers. People went there because they were good, because they had properties of rehabilitation and restoration. In Colossae, there was cold water. It was refreshing, clear. But when water arrived from both sources, it arrived lukewarm and full of lime, and drinking it made people sick. It was not hot enough to relax or restore. It was not cool enough to quench. That is what our Lord is saying about this church: “You make me sick.” Nobody likes to drink lukewarm coffee. It has to be either hot or cold. Jesus takes something familiar to these people and tells them that it describes their spiritual condition. They were lukewarm. It means they lost their zeal and spiritual fervor (Ro12:11). They became apathetic and indifferent. Maybe their motto was “Whatever” or “who cares?” Jesus says, “You make me want to vomit. You make me sick.” Pretty harsh. Jesus doesn’t want us to be lukewarm in our relationship with him, but passionate. He wants us to love and serve him with an undying, fervent love.

Not only that, they were greatly deceived. Look at verse 17. “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” 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 also spiritual wealth. Maybe they met together in spiritual pride thinking they were the holy people. They say, “I’m rich. I have become wealthy. I do not need a thing.” That is the worst state a person can be in. It would be better to be an atheist than being spiritually proud. It would be better to be completely ignorant of the gospel than being proud.

Look at verse 18. “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” Salvation is the gold which makes us spiritually rich in faith. It is the white robe that covers our sinful nakedness with the righteousness of God through Christ. It is the eye salve which gives us the knowledge of God, illuminating grace and understanding of God’s truth. This is a call to salvation in a three-fold description. Jesus seems so harsh with this church. But then he says something else. Look at verse 19. “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.” Real love is not to spoil, but to rebuke and discipline. Jesus wants us to be earnest and to repent.

Look at verse 20. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” The invitation in verse 20 is one of the most familiar in all the Bible, one of the most misunderstood. A popular idea is that Jesus is knocking on the door of our heart. That is not the picture. Jesus is saying, “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 and will eat with him and he with me.” All it takes is one true Christian. If one person opens the door, Jesus will come into that church. A shared meal was a symbol of union. A shared meal was a symbol of fellowship. This is one final plea, one last plea. So our Lord stands knocking on the door of Laodicea. He is 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.

Let’s summarize the problems in each of the seven churches: Ephesus, losing their first love; Smyrna, fear of suffering; Pergamum, doctrinal defection; Tyatira, moral departure; Sardis, spiritual deadness; Philadelphia, not holding fast; Laodicea, lukewarmness. Let’s pray that we may be the one who is victorious in whatever church we are so that we may please God and be a kingdom and priests in this generation.