**THE MESSAGE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES, PART 2**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 3**

Prayer: “Oh God, make us the people you want us to be. Search our hearts with your Word. Purge any sin from our lives. Lord, make everything we do as individuals and as a church be relevant and may we honor You.”

Continuing in our study of the Book of Revelation, we’re looking at the letters to the churches mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3. These letters were dictated to John by Jesus Himself. Jesus has something to say to 7 very real churches of John’s day located in present day Turkey. Jesus’ words reveal a lot about these churches’ spiritual condition. Last week we looked at His messages to the first 4 churches. The church at Ephesus was the church that left its first love. Jesus calls on them to remember, repent and return. The church at Smyrna was the faithful church. It was a church experiencing persecution and Jesus tells them to persevere under trial and He will give them a crown of life. The church at Pergamum was the compromising church. Jesus tells them to repent lest they be judged. The church at Thyatira was the adulterous church. Like the church at Corinth, they had become easily deceived by a false doctrine and embraced iniquity. Jesus has some very harsh words of judgment for the majority if they do not repent. To the faithful few He tells them to “hold fast.” In every church no matter how bad they are there are always a faithful remnant.

[For a clarification of Revelation 2:22-23 see handout]

**1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars** [now Jesus begins to dictate his message to John]. **"'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.**

I call the church at Sardis “the dead church.” The church at Sardis is a spiritually dead church. There is religious activity going on. They look alive, but they are spiritually dead. The word Sardis means “the remnant that remains.” This is an appropriate description of the church. Though the church as a whole has been pronounced dead, there are still a few faithful who are very much alive. So there is a ray of hope.

**2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.**

**3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.**

Jesus gives them this message: “Wake up church!” He tells them to strengthen what remains. Don’t abandon the sinking ship. You stay and strengthen it. Revitalize the living remnant that remains. It’s only natural to want to be a part of a larger, growing fellowship, but where has God placed you? What work does He have for you to do where you are? Serve faithfully in the place you are until such a time that He moves you.

**4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.**

In each of these churches, even the ones who had gotten way off track, there is a faithful remnant. Here the Lord addresses the faithful remnant in Sardis, those who had not defiled their garments. Garments are representative of one’s character.

**5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.**

**6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

Jesus promises the one who conquers (KJV overcomer) 3 things. First, a white garment. The picture here is that you trade in your old dirty rags, your old dirty self, for the purity of Christ. Second, He states that He will not erase or blot their name out of the book of life. No matter what we do, if we have accepted Christ He will NOT blot our names out of the book of life. That’s what He says. This is a proof text for eternal security. Finally, Jesus promises that He will confess their name before His father and the angels. Jesus said, “Everyone who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33) These 3 promises drive home the certainty of our salvation.

**7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia** [city of brotherly love] **write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.**

We have been reminded of the many shortcomings of a church as we have heard the messages to the churches at Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis. Jesus has been very critical of these churches for embracing the sin of their culture. After all of that you’ll find this letter to the church at Philadelphia to be a bit refreshing. Jesus has nothing but praise for them.

**8 "'I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.**

The church at Philadelphia was an evangelistic and missionary-minded church. This church has been obedient to the Great Commission. They have been busy telling others about Jesus. For this reason, I call the church at Philadelphia the obedient church. God is telling this church that has a missionary heartbeat that He is about to give them an open door of missionary efforts. Because these believers have been faithful in spreading the Gospel throughout their pagan city, God is going to reward them with even greater opportunity.

**9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.**

Jesus uses the expression “synagogue of Satan” in reference to a group of Jews in this city who had rejected Him as their long-awaited Messiah and practiced an empty religion. The term “synagogue of Satan” was used previously in our Lord’s message to another persecuted church, the church at Smyrna. According to Jesus, a genuine Jew recognizes his or her Messiah and follows Him. These so-called Philadelphia Jews refused to believe the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ alone. They even persecuted the Christian church at Philadelphia for preaching this message. They became Satan’s instruments of interference against the cause of Christianity in that city. Jesus promised the church at Philadelphia that He would make their enemies to know that God loves His church.

**10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.**

Here we have a promise that these believers in Jesus Christ will not have to go through the Great Tribulation. That’s a great promise! We’ll discuss this further when we return in a few weeks after the new year.

**11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.**

Jesus says in affect, “Don’t let the world and the things of this world get you off track. Stay the course! Keep doing what you’ve been doing.”

**12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.**

The city of Philadelphia had a history of earthquakes. Six times in the previous 140 years (at the time of this message) earthquakes had devastated the city including its temples. The custom was that when the pillars in the temple were rebuilt, they were erected in honor of important city officials and their names were written on the pillars. God is saying that the pillars of His temple are not made of stone or marble but of living people, those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The phrase “never shall he go out of it” means that in God’s temple, unlike the temple of the gods, there will be no destruction, displacement of people and subsequent rebuilding, but it will last forever. No earthquake will bring His temple down!

The names written in the pillars of God’s temple are NOT the names of important people, great saints or faithful followers. One name written, “the name of My God,” the name Paul described in Philippians 2:9-10 as being above every name – the name of Jesus. In those days slavery was still an institution that was practiced and typically slaves would be branded with the name of their master. The brand designated ownership. In the same way we who belong to Christ will be branded with the name of our Master, our glorious Savior, the One to whom we belong.

Notice that there is a second name written, “the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem.” This is the passport for us believers to our eternal destination. One day we’ll leave behind this old earth, the place of our spiritual rebirth, and go home to be with God for an eternity!

The third and final name written is “My own new name.” Believers in Jesus Christ are corporately the church, the bride of Christ. When He comes for us, He will give us His new name just as a bride is given the new name of her husband. We do not know His new name now, but we will know it when He comes for us. This “new name” denotes our personal relationship with Christ.

**13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

Here we have a familiar refrain. Do you get the idea that Jesus’ messages to His churches are intended to be heard and heeded?

**14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.**

Jesus gives His message to the church at Laodicea. As you’ll see it is the most disappointing of the 7 churches to Jesus. He has nothing good to say to them.

**15 "'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!**

**16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**

“I will spit you out.” The original Greek here literally is translated “to vomit.” The church at Laodicea is lukewarm – neither hot nor cold. And it makes Jesus sick. I call this church the lukewarm church, one that makes God sick. He says He would have preferred that they be either hot or cold. If they had been “hot” then they would be on fire and enthusiastic for Jesus, which would have filled Him with great joy. Such was the case with the church of Smyrna, who faithfully endured severe persecution without wavering; so too was the church at Philadelphia, who was obedient and had a heart for evangelism; and to a lesser extent even the church at Ephesus, who persevered and did not put up with false teachings.

What surprises me here in these verses is that Jesus would have preferred if the church at Laodicea had been “cold,” the totally opposite extreme – worldly, lifeless and lost, calloused by sin, in utter rejection of God, just like all those pagan idolaters of their city. Why is that? Why would He prefer them to be cold rather than lukewarm? Because at least then it would be clear where they stood. Those who are “cold” for Christ do not straddle the fence. They are unequivocally against God and we can deal with that. After we have been faithful to witness to such a person and they react with hostility to the Gospel and basically tell us to get lost, we can move on. We have done what we can and planted a seed. We continue to pray for them and hold out hope that, in time, God’s Holy Spirit will convict them of their lost state. How interesting it is that the Apostle Paul in his long missionary career had a better track record convincing the pagan Gentiles, those considered as “cold,” of the error of their ways and need for Christ than he did convincing religious snobs in the church who taught false doctrines, the “lukewarm,” that they were wrong.

**17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

They thought they were rich and had it all, but Jesus tells them that this is NOT the case. Instead Jesus says they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. They are only fooling themselves. What they SAY is one thing, but what they ARE is something altogether different.

**18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.**

Jesus wants them to buy from Him. He is the only source of supply of all we need in our life. Jesus offers the church at Laodicea 3 spiritual remedies to their poor, naked and blind condition. Each one directly correlates to three major sources of wealth in Laodicea: banking, textile industry and the manufacture of eye salve. He ties these things to the spiritual condition of this church.

**19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**

**20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**

Here we see a picture of how Jesus, locked out of His own church standing outside, continuing to knock. Why does Jesus do this? Why does He continue knocking? Because He loves His church and desires to once again have sweet fellowship with us.

In the Song of Solomon the bride hears a voice outside her door… “A voice! My beloved was knocking: ‘Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of the night.’” She hears him, but she begins to make excuses… “I have taken off my dress, how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet, how can I dirty them again?” My beloved extended his hand through the opening, and my feelings were aroused for him. I arose to open to my beloved; and my hands dripped with myrrh on the handles of the bolt [this is a reference to a rather expensive gift he had left his wife on the door]. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone! My heart went out to him as he spoke [a reference to how she felt earlier as he had spoken to her]. I searched for him, but I did not find him. I called him, but he did not answer me.” (Song of Solomon 5:2-6) She then proceeds to inquire around town where her beloved could be.

How long will Jesus continue to knock? Well, He is very patient. But will not strive with us forever (see Genesis 6:3). If He knocks ANSWER THE DOOR AND LET HIM IN! What a sad commentary this on this church who had shut Jesus out of their congregation.

**21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

Once again, who is the one who conquers, who overcomes? The Scripture tells us that they are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:5) Jesus’ promises those who embrace Him as their Savior and Lord that they will rule and reign with Him in His coming kingdom.

**22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"**

Did you hear what our Lord said to the churches? Today His Spirit is speaking to us…

And with the close of Chapter 3 the church age draws to an end. Jesus warns us that, in the last days, apostasy, indifference, and deadness in the church will increase. But He’s coming back very soon for His own. “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8b)

An appropriate question as we prepare for the rapture of the church. That will be next time!