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Revelation 3

So last week in chapter 2, we looked at the loveless church, which was the church at Ephesus. They were a very hard working church, but they were doing those works in their own strength and power; and they had more or less forgotten why they were doing. In other words, they were just going through the motions of doing church, if you will, and their love for Christ was no longer their motivator.

And then we looked at the church at Smyrna, which was the persecuted church. And Jesus had only good things to say about this church and He was encouraging them to hold fast to their faith and to keep their eyes on the prize.

And then we looked at the church at Pergamus, which is described as the compromising church. And Jesus first starts out by commending this church for their faithfulness; even in the midst of persecution and the threat of harm they were faithful. And then He also acknowledges the fact that they are surrounded by the enemy. In other words, Satan had a very strong presence and was very influential in this city where they ministered.

But then He condemns them for not dealing properly with those within the church who are teaching false doctrines to the people. And He warns them that if they don't repent, and immediately rid their fellowship of these false prophets, He's going to bring down judgment on the entire church.

And then lastly, we looked at the church at Thyatira, which is known as the corrupt church. And again, Jesus brags on their works, and their love, and their service, and faith, and their patience. And even mentions that they've been doing even better in their works recently than they had been doing before.

But then He condemns them for allowing a woman in their congregation to openly and blatantly commit sexual immorality and seduce others to join her and to also eat things that had been sacrificed to idols.

And Jesus warns those who have been participating in this sinful lifestyle, as well as those who have been tolerant of this situation, to repent of their evil deeds or like the others, face the judgment of God.

And so that brings us to chapter 3 and to the church at Sardis, which is known as the dead church. And like we learned last week, each of these churches also represents a specific time period within the church age. And the church at Sardis represents the Protestant church age which begins in 1517 ad and ends in 1800 ad.

Now, I don't know about you but I don't want to be known as or a part of a dead church. And believe me, there are some out there. I've been to some. In fact, I've preached at some or at least tried to preach. And I can assure you, it's not pleasant.

Look at verse 1 in chapter 3.

Revelation 3:1, "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore

how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but 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.” ’

So this is Sardis, again, better known as the dying or dead church.

The church at Sardis was a church with works, but not very much life. In other words, at some time in the past, they had had a reputation for being alive, but it's become very obvious now, that they're dead.

John MacArthur gives an illustration that might help you to understand what Jesus is trying to tell us here.

He gives the example of a star. The nearest star to us here on earth is trillions of miles away. And the way we measure that distance, of course, is in light years. One light year is the distance that light, traveling at 186,000 miles a second, will travel in one year. And that some total would be a distance of over 6 trillion miles.

Now, given that enormous distance, and the time that it would take to travel that distance, he brought up a very interesting possibility. He said, that a star, that was say 30 light years away from the earth, if it were to burn out and no longer emit light, it would take thirty years for us to realize that it had burned out.

In other words, the light from that star, even though the star no longer burned or emitted any light, would remain as though it was lit for another thirty years, at least as far as we're concerned.

And mcArthur says, that's what Jesus is trying to get us to understand here.

That some churches, even though they're dead in the present, they're still emitting light; but that light's, nothing but a reflection of their past.

And when we look at them from a distance, it might look as if nothing's changed! But when you take a closer look, you find that sin, and false teaching, and false doctrine has long since caused their light to be extinguished.

And so the church at Sardis was such a church. They had a reputation for being a light, but the Lord Jesus, who sees and knows all things has more or less pronounced them dead.

And so Christ warns the saints: He says, (1) Be watchful, be alert; (2) strengthen the few things you do have; (3) remember the Word you have received and heard; (4) and hold fast to the things you have and be ready when I come.

And then in verse 5 He makes a statement that some people misunderstand.

5 He says, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Some people take this promise from Christ to mean just the opposite to what it really means. They think it says that a Christian can somehow lose

his or her salvation, or that their name can somehow be removed from the book of life.

But that's not what it says.

Those who overcome, are the one's whose names are written in the book of life. But those who reject the Lord Jesus, are those whose names have been blotted out from the book of life, because spiritually they're dead.

Only the names of those who are true believers will have their names permanently recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. That's what it's saying.

Revelation 13:8 says, All who dwell on the earth will worship him, (that's the antichrist. And then it goes on to say that it is those people) **whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.**

And then in **Revelation 21:27, we read these words, But there shall by no means enter it (that's heaven) anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.**

And then in Revelation 20:11, We have John's vision of the Great White Throne Judgment.

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his

works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

I believe a lot of people are going to die with their names on a church roll, but when “the books are opened”, and the Book of life is opened, their names are not going to be there.

Next, we have the church at Philadelphia, which is referred to as the faithful church. And this church represents the church from around the beginning of the 19th century to the Rapture of the church. And this church age is sometimes referred to as the revived church age.

Look at verse 7.

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God.
And I will write on him My new name.**

13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

So this is the church at Philadelphia, otherwise known as the serving church. And like most of us already know, their name, Philadelphia, actually means “brotherly love”. And so immediately, we know we are dealing with people who have been born again. People, who not only love the Lord, but who love each other. And so this church represents the missionary church in the last days, which I’m glad to say, includes The Mission Church.

Now, with the exception of an occasional mission venture, the churches during the Middle Ages, did very little to spread the Gospel to other lands. In fact, they spent most of their time fighting religious wars, and playing politics with civil rulers.

But toward the beginning of the 19th century, the church came alive. In other words, it was revived. And this new life became evident when it began to make a concerted effort to grow the kingdom of God and to spread the gospel to others.

Now, we know from history that the church at Philadelphia was a very small church. It didn’t have great numbers of people who attended. And the Lord mentions that in verse 8. He says, for you have a little strength.

But a little strength coupled with the word of God and the power of God can have a great impact on a community and even on the world.

When a church is willing by faith and love, to go through doors that have been opened by the Holy Spirt, well, great things can happen. Things greater than anything they could have ever do in their own strength, or even

imagine in their minds. Because when God opens a door, nobody can shut it, and nobody can interfere.

Now, this church, we're also told had opposition from the false church of Satan. These false brethren were in opposition to the ministry of God's people, but Christ promises to fight that battle Himself, and He promises, to one day bring those folks to their knees. And though the false church, even today, has popularity, and influence, and money, one day it will bow before God, as well as before the genuine saints of God, who will be looking on.

And then in verse 10, we read one of the greatest promises in the Bible which is written specifically to the church. Jesus says in verse, **10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**

And this I believe, as many others believe, is one of the strongest declarations in the Bible that the church **will not** go through the Tribulation Period. I believe the Bible is very clear that all true believers will be spared of that seven year period of awful judgment which the Bible calls the great Tribulation Period.

And then the last church the Lord Jesus addressed, is the **church at Laodicea**, which is known as the lukewarm church. And this church also represents the church during the last days. And friend, we're living in the last days. And though some churches may reflect the characteristics of the church at Philadelphia, just as many, or even more churches, reflect the characteristics of the church at Laodicea.

14 “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’ ”

This is Laodicea, the lukewarm church or as many call it, the apostate church.

In fact, the name “Laodicea” means “the rule of the people”. It’s the picture of a church which is run by the people. It’s a church full of people that no longer follow their spiritual leaders, or the authority of the Word of God. And so they’re a mixture of hot and cold. A church that once held to the truth of the word of God, but which has now been diluted with error.

And the real tragedy is that this church thinks in its mind that it's "rich"! It doesn't even realize that in God's eyes, it's poor, and pitiful, and blind, and naked.

And it's no doubt a picture of the apostate church of today. It's the picture of a church that has prestige, and wealth, and political power, yet all the while, it's spiritually poor.

The city of Laodicea was known for its wool, and its wealth, as well as its' medicine. And so Christ in verse 18, uses those images to address this church. **He** wanted to give them wealth, but not the kind of wealth they were looking for. He wanted to give them the true riches of the Word of God.

And He wasn't concerned with their wool making industry; He was more concerned with giving them garments of grace. And as for their great ability to produce medicine, He wasn't particularly concerned with that either. Instead, He wanted to give them the ability to see spiritual things. Because there was something wrong with their values and their vision. And if they would not repent, then He would rebuke them, and chasten them in love.

And in verse 20 Jesus says, **Behold**, (that means fix your eyes upon Me, or give Me your undivided attention because) **I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. And if anyone will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**

And you know many times, as preachers, we use this verse as an invitation to be saved. But really it was intended to be a picture of Christ; standing outside the door of a lukewarm church. A church that has wealth and power, and thinks it is rich, but it doesn't have Christ.

And as He stands there knocking on the door, He's willing to come in; even if it's into the life of just one person; if that one person would just be willing to open the door and invite Him.

And thank God some people do open the door and invite Him in. In spite of all the noise and distraction that this old world can throw at us, some people, by the grace of God, are given the ability to block all that noise out; and focus on what really matters, and invite Jesus to come into their heart.

And thank God I was one of those people and many of you were as well, but the sad truth is, there are still a lot of lukewarm churches, and lukewarm church members who won't, because they're just too busy, or too proud to open the door; and they're just not willing to admit their lostness, and so they're content to just leave Jesus outside the door; knocking.

And friend, just as these churches existed in John's day, so they exist today. We have many busy churches, just like the church at Ephesus that have left their first love. And we have churches like that of Laodicea, that may have started out like the church at Ephesus, but then ended up like the church at Laodicea. And of course we have examples of every other church mentioned in these letters as well in these last days.

It's very easy, even in the church today, for false doctrine to infiltrate the church. And it will usually begin in a very small and subtle way; but then it will grow; and eventually, if left alone, it will infect almost the entire assembly.

But as always, there will be a small remnant of true believers; Jesus in verse 21, calls them over-comers: and over-comers are those who will stand for Jesus, and uphold the truth of God's word, no matter what. Just like Daniel and Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego, who we've been studying

on Sunday mornings, an over-comer is someone who stands for Jesus, regardless of the consequences.

And I don't know about you, but I want to be an over-comer. I want to be one of the ones who remains faithful to Christ until He returns. Amen!

Well, that concludes the seven letters written by Christ to the seven churches of Asia Minor, but again remember, every one of these letters has application for the church today; as well as for us as individuals.

And so just like Jesus tells us at the end of everyone of these letters, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says."

Let's pray together.