

CHAPTER 3





Understanding the Book of Revelation | Chapter 3

WITH PASTOR TOM



JESUS' LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES (CONT'D)



To the church at Sardis

Revelation 3:1a:

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

Sardis was the place where modern money was born.

And the seven stars: Jesus also has the fullness of the church in His hand.

I know your works: As Jesus said to each church, He also said to Sardis. What a church is and what a church does is never hidden from Jesus.

Jesus knew the church at Sardis had a name — that is, a reputation. In the church of Revelation 3:1d: But you are dead.

Dead: Despite their reputation of life, Jesus saw them for what they really were. But you are dead shows that a good reputation is no guarantee of true spiritual character. Despite their good appearance, Jesus saw them as dead.

Dead: This indicates no struggle, no fight, no persecution.

Being dead, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan's domain, so it wasn't worth attacking.

Revelation 3:2-4:

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 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. 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.

Be watchful: The things which remain tells us that though the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis was bad, it wasn't hopeless. Spiritually, there were things which remain that could be strengthened.

I have not found your works perfect before God: This shows that their works, though present, had not measured up to God's standard.

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent: What they must do was to remember how they first received and heard the Word of God.

Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief: Jesus warned them of the great danger in failing to watch.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments: Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a few names.

Even in Sardis: Even shows that in some ways it was remarkable that there were a few names still faithful to the Lord.

And they shall walk with Me in white: Jesus also promised that these pure ones would walk with Me.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments: Jesus identified the overcomers with those few names who have not defiled their garments (Revelation 3:4). These overcomers would wear white garments, received from Jesus.

Real righteousness is receiving God's covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin (Genesis 3:7) but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).

And I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life: By this, the overcomers were assured of their heavenly citizenship.

Blot out his name from the Book of Life: Does this mean that someone can lose their salvation? The focus is assurance, so we should not think that names are being constantly erased and then rewritten.

Moses said to the Lord: Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. (Exodus 32:32)

And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book." (Exodus 32:33)

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. (Psalm 69:28)

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. (Revelation 3:5)

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:19)

Being born of Adam doesn't guarantee that our name is written in the Book of Life. Being born again — born of Jesus Christ — gives us that assurance.

But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels: This was an amazing promise. It simply makes sense that we should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, but it is amazing that He would not be ashamed to confess us!

Revelation 3:6:

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

Let him hear: We must all hear what the Spirit says to the church at Sardis.

Revelation 3:7a - The character of the city of Philadelphia.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

Philadelphia: The name means brotherly love, and this city was the youngest of the seven cities.

Philadelphia: This was a prosperous city. Philadelphia commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East.

This city was also known for beautiful buildings (it was called the “little Athens”).

Revelation 3:7b:

‘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”:

These things says He who is holy, He who is true: Jesus reminded the church in Philadelphia that He was holy and true.

He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: Jesus showed He is also the keeper of the keys and doors.

Revelation 3:8:

“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.

I know your works: Jesus said this to each of the seven churches. The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus knew it.

I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it: The church in Philadelphia had an open door set before them. Often, an open door speaks of evangelistic opportunity.

And no one can shut it: The emphasis is on unhindered openness. There is nothing that can keep them from their access to this door.

For you have a little strength: The term a little strength does not imply weakness, but real strength. They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord.

Have kept My word, and have not denied My name: The idea behind have not denied My name is not only that they expressed their allegiance to Jesus, but that they lived in a way that was faithful to the name and character of Jesus.

Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia:

- Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door).
- Reliance on God (You have a little strength).
- Faithfulness to Jesus (have kept My word, and have not denied My name).

Revelation 3:9-10:

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. 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.

I will make those of the synagogue of Satan: Apparently, the Christians in Philadelphia were persecuted by Jewish people (the synagogue). However, these persecuting Jews were Jews in name only (who say they are Jews and are not, but lie). In fact, they had no spiritual connection to Abraham or to the people of faith.

I will make them come and worship before your feet: In this, Jesus promised that He would vindicate His people and make sure that their persecutors recognized they were wrong, and that Jesus and His followers were right.

And to know that I have loved you: As those who were once their enemies worshipped along side them, they were destroyed as enemies.

I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world: Jesus also promised them protection from the hour of trial coming on the whole world.

To test those who dwell on the earth: The test is directed against those who dwell on the earth.

Those who dwell on the earth refers not to believers but to unbelievers who are objects of God's wrath throughout Revelation.

Keep you from the hour of trial: Does this imply an escape before the Great Tribulation, or does it promise protection in it? Each side believes this passage easily supports their position.

Those who believe the church will be here on earth during this time of Great Tribulation focus on Jesus' command to persevere, and say the context demands seeing this as protection that enables the faithful to persevere in the period.

Those who believe that Jesus will come for His church before this time of Great Tribulation note that protection is promised from the very hour of trial, not just the trial itself.

As far as the Philadelphian church was concerned, the rapture of the church was presented to them as an imminent hope.

Revelation 3:11:

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Behold, I am coming quickly: First, the church at Philadelphia must remember that Jesus is coming quickly, and they must prepare for His coming.

Hold fast what you have: The church at Philadelphia must not depart from its solid foundation, as described in Revelation 3:8:

- Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door).
- Reliance on God (You have a little strength).
- Faithfulness to Jesus (have kept My word, and have not denied My name).

That no one may take your crown: If they failed to hold fast, their crown might be given to another.

Revelation 3:12:

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar: Overcomers were told that they would be as a pillar in the temple of My God. Pillars were pictures of strength, stability, and dignified beauty.

When a building collapsed in an earthquake often all that remained standing were the huge pillars.

The pillar holds up the building. The only thing supporting the pillar is the foundation. True pillars in the church support the church, and they look to Jesus as their support foundation.

He shall go out no more: The overcomer would have a place of permanence and stability with God, in contrast to an uncertain place in this world.

I will write on him the name of My God... I will write on him My new name: The overcomer also received many names — of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus.

Revelation 3:14a:

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

The church of the Laodiceans: Laodicea was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population.

The church of the Laodiceans: The church at Laodicea is mentioned by Paul — in a somewhat unfavourable light — in Colossians 2:1 and 4:16.

Revelation 3:14b:

‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

These things says the Amen: Jesus is the Amen, the “so be it,” the “it is done.”

The Faithful and True Witness: This is Jesus, and this was a contrast to the Laodiceans, who will be shown to be neither faithful nor true.

Revelation 3:15-16:

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

You are neither cold nor hot: This picture of lukewarmness would immediately connect with the Christians of Laodicea because the water they drank every day was lukewarm. In this spiritual sense, lukewarmness is a picture of indifference and compromise.

I could wish that you were cold or hot: What Jesus wanted to change in them (and us) as much as anything is the deceptive playing of the middle, trying to please both the world and Jesus.

Yet if they would not be hot, Jesus preferred cold rather than lukewarm.

Because you are lukewarm: An Earnest Warning against Lukewarmness.

They have prayer-meetings, but there are few present, for they like quiet evenings home.

I will vomit you out of My mouth: How are churches in the mouth of Jesus?

- They are in His mouth because they spread His Word.
- They are in His mouth because He prays for them constantly.

Revelation 3:17:

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—

You say, "I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of spiritual poverty. They looked at their spiritual condition and said "rich." They looked again and said "wealthy." They looked a third time and said, "We have need of nothing."

And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus looked at their spiritual condition and said, "wretched." He looked again and said, "miserable." A third time Jesus looked and said, "poor."

Revelation 3:18-20:

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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. 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 dine with him, and he with Me.

I counsel you to buy from Me: We must seek these things from Jesus instead of relying on them ourselves.

Buy from Me gold refined in the fire: If they received from Jesus His riches, His gold — beautifully refined in the fire — then they may be rich.

White garments, that you may be clothed: If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would be clothed, and no longer would the shame of your nakedness.

Anoint your eyes with eye salve: If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to see.

Therefore be zealous and repent: He commanded them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in zeal. "Turn your way," Jesus said.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: He knocked at their door...If anyone hears my voice.

The idea of Jesus at the door applies to the sinner and to the saint just the same.

Why did Jesus stand outside the door? Why did He knock? Why did He wait until someone opens the door? He had every right to break down the door... Jesus has His eternal plan by wooing the cooperation of the human heart. The occupant must open the door.

I will come into him: What a glorious promise! If we open the door, He will come in. He won't ring the bell and run away. He promised to come in, and then to dine with the believer.

When Jesus said dine with him, He spoke of a specific meal known as the deipnon (supper) The deipnon was the main meal of the day and was a leisurely affair, not a hurried snack. This speaks of fellowship. This speaks of a depth to the relationship.

If anyone: Notice that Jesus gave the call to individuals. He didn't say, "If any church," but if anyone. We must not talk about setting the church right, we must pray for grace each one for himself, for the text does not say, 'If the church will open the door,' but 'If any man hear my voice and open the door.' It must be done by individuals: the church will only get right by each man getting right.

Revelation 3:21:

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.

To him who overcomes: If we are, we can change and become one of Jesus' overcomers.

I will grant to sit with Me on My throne: Those who overcome the battle against indifference, compromise, and self-reliance, receive a special reward.

Revelation 3:22:

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

He who has an ear, let him hear: Few want to identify themselves with the church of Laodicea. We would much rather identify ourselves with the church at Philadelphia.

Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: We must hear what the Holy Spirit says here, because He speaks to the churches.