

## **“To Laodicea: Open the Door of Your Heart”**

*Revelation 3:14-22*

Rev. Min J. Chung

(Lord's Day Service, April 30, 2017)

### **Revelation 3:14-22**

<sup>14</sup>“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.

<sup>15</sup>“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

### **INTRODUCTION**

Of the seven churches, Laodicea is the dead one. Also, in examining the five churches that were rebuked, one sees a worsening progression. Without love (Ephesus), one becomes like Pergamum in compromising, then spiritually sick (Thyatira). Next, one begins slumbering (Sardis), not just falling asleep but slowly dying, like a person losing blood. Ultimately, one becomes like the church of Laodicea. In this scenario, Jesus is not even inside the church, but outside, knocking on the door. I will end this sermon positively by talking about the attitude of Jesus towards the church and a hopeful picture of what we ought to be as the Church of Jesus Christ.

To begin, of these seven cities in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, Laodicea was famous for its worship of Zeus who appears on some of the city's coinage. Not only was it one of the wealthiest cities during Roman times, it was also popular for its banking establishment, medical facilities, and textile industry. In fact, when an earthquake damaged the city in A.D 70 they were so self-sufficient that they declined imperial disaster relief. Thus, the city did not see itself as poor, blind, and naked; neither did the complacent and proud church within it. While Smyrna was materially poor and spiritually rich, the Laodiceans were materially rich but spiritually poor. It must be mentioned however, that the city's major weakness was a lack of adequate water supply, so they had a big aqueduct system to supply mineral-rich water from cities south of Laodicea.

The Laodicean church reminds me of churches in America; affluent and thus hard to see our true need. To illustrate this, if I were to wrinkle \$2 and throw it to you, you might say, “Why is he throwing \$2?” But if I do the same in some places in Africa, they might say, “Why are you throwing that much money?” 3 billion people around the world live on less than \$2.50 a day. This is about a day's wage for many of the 80% of people living on less than \$10 a day. Thus, affluence is spiritually disadvantageous as one may not see that he lacks something. The affluent do not have to worry about anything, have nothing much to lose, and do not really have to pray as a result. Most people really mean it literally, when they pray in the morning “Give us this day our daily bread.” Not having to pray in a similar manner, one feels like he has plenty and possesses a false sense of security, in addition to thinking that he is better than others. This passage teaches us to open the door of our hearts and see our spiritual poverty and blindness.

## **I. Jesus addresses [14]**

<sup>14</sup>“*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.*”

Initially, Jesus addresses Himself as the one who is writing, by first giving names that is often a picture of Him that is applicable within the letter.

### **A. The Amen**

The Hebrew transliteration means ‘faithful and true.’ He is God’s reliable confirmation to all the divine promises.

*2 Corinthians 1:20 – For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*

When we say ‘Amen,’ not only do we receive His promises in faith but we give Him the glory. We are declaring His worthiness and beauty to the world. Learn to say ‘Amen’ when something is good, and Jesus is good. It means, ‘Yes Lord! Jesus is Amen.’ It is His ‘yes’ to the purpose of God. His ‘yes’ to our obedience to God. If we say yes to His Word and His will, we have power to be a witness in the world.

### **B. The faithful and true witness**

This phrase reiterates what ‘Amen’ means but adds the word ‘witness.’ Jesus is the witness and the proof to us, in that He testifies of the Father’s faithfulness in His promises. He became visible to show us that God the Father is faithful and true.

### **C. The beginning of God’s creation**

Jehovah’s Witnesses today take this phrase to mean that Christ is not eternal with God the Father, but simply the first and greatest creature that God made. If this is true, then Jesus is not to be worshipped, as only God, and not His creation is to be worshipped.

*Revelation 19:10 – Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

Here, John was amazed by the vision of angels that he worshipped them. This verse however says, worship God only. Revelation 3-5 is a vision of the heavenly realm where Jesus is worshipped by everything that exists. Jesus is God himself who should receive worship.

*John 1: 3 – All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*

Here, John is talking about Jesus Christ. He mentions the word ‘beginning,’ because the word complements the end, thus expressing God’s eternity and signifying His sovereign rule over everything. The one who speaks to us in this letter is God’s own son, not less than God, but a different person possessing the same attributes of God.

## **II. Jesus rebukes [15-17]**

<sup>15</sup>“*I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!* <sup>16</sup>*So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.* <sup>17</sup>*For you*

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

**A. The assessment of their condition [15-16]**

<sup>15</sup>“*I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!* <sup>16</sup>*So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*

The traditional interpretation of this is that the temperature of the water is the temperature of our spirituality. While that is not really wrong, the historical background gives us a better understanding. Laodicea, without a water source brought in water from Hierapolis and Colossae. Hot water came from the springs in Hierapolis, about 5 miles away, gave a medical effect, while cold refreshing water came from Colossae. By the time the water arrived to Laodicea, it became lukewarm in being neither cold nor hot, and dirty with minerals that caused people to spit it out. In this context, cold and hot are both good but lukewarm people are useless in the kingdom of God due to pride and being cut off from the source. Water that is cut off from the source and remains in the faucet for a long period of time often tastes terrible and disgusting. Any Christ in them would have been useful but Christ was outside their church. They supplied neither healing for the spiritually sick nor refreshment for the spiritually weary.

**B. The cause of their condition – pride [17]**

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

Pride says I am something and I have all these things. ‘I am’ and ‘I have’- who you are and what you possess.

**1. “I am” – Incorrect evaluation of themselves**

Their evaluation of themselves in comparison to what Christ said they are, was different. We notice this by comparing the two phrases, ‘you say,’ what the Laodicean church was saying, and ‘not realizing’ meaning that what they were saying is in opposition to what Jesus was saying. There is always the evaluation of the world -how they evaluate things- and evaluation of the Word. I often meet people whose evaluation of themselves and my evaluation of them are drastically different. In shows like American Idol, terrible singers often think otherwise because I think their moms told them “you are awesome and great.” People often misdiagnose and miscalculate themselves. Similarly, spiritually proud people really do not know themselves. Do not evaluate yourself solely on what other people say, but through the mirror of God’s Word. However, wisely be around people who are honest and tell you what your heart and life looks like, as it is much better to be shocked right now than on the Judgment Day. There are people who do not listen other’s evaluation, like a wife not listening to a husband’s honest evaluation of her cooking, leading to a lack of improvement.

**2. “I have” – Incorrect basis of the evaluation of themselves**

If they say ‘I need nothing,’ they are basically saying ‘I have something.’ Why do we get proud when we have things like resources and ability? Often we hear evaluation from other people and over time, that becomes our interpretation of who we are and our identity. We think we are better than others and better than who we really are. Pride says, “I can do it all because if you are good at one thing, you can do other things.” But humility says, “I can do it all *through Christ who strengthens me.*” Confidence in God helps us do things maximally for the glory of Christ. This passage touches on the prosperity theology- they were rich

and they *thought* they were doing spiritually well because they were rich. Prosperity theology basically says money equals blessings from God. Money can be a blessing from God, but being rich does not necessarily mean affirmation from God. Affirmation from God does not always mean that you get money. Money here can be health or circumstances. Prosperity gospel says things will go well if you are right with God. However, God blesses you more not to increase your standard of living but to increase your standard of giving. If God gives you more, it is so that you can share. When we give in love and gratitude, our hearts grow and our hands show who God. Through the material things visible to others, they can experience the giving and gracious hand of God through our giving. Money goes from being a blessing to curse if in our hearts, Christ is not first. If our hearts are right, we will use money for people and God rather than use people to get more money.

Jesus implied that they had money but were still poor. The Bible talks about a spiritual prosperity theology- things will go well, you will grow, you will be rich spiritually, otherwise Jesus was the most unblessed person. Christ was only a moderate influence in their lives and they had no burning desire for more of Jesus, hence their indictment and threat. They did not go hard after Him in the secret place, neither did they fling the door open wide, opening the door of their hearts to welcome Him in the innermost place of their lives. They liked the ancient unbiblical proverb, 'moderation in all things.' The bible wants radical teaching and a radical obedience to Christ and following Him. However, comfortable compromise is often easier than faithful sacrifice in our lives.

About 20 years ago I think I was in Uganda, where there were about 5 million orphans. Many of them HIV-positive having been conceived by parents with the virus. I preached at a small church that had adopted 8 of these children. A cute bald girl came up to sing before I preached. You could see how loved she was through people's smiles. "Today I am only going to sing one song," she said, prior to her rendition of a song entitled, 'You Need Jesus.' Here was a little girl who was HIV-positive, who in our eyes had nothing, yet she was saying, "YOU need Jesus! I have everything I need because I have Jesus and I do not need anything else. In fact, even if you have everything, you have nothing if you do not have Jesus." I was wowed. A spiritually poor person does not want more of Jesus. I wrap up this point by posing a series of questions to you. What do you need? What do you feel you need? What do you pursue after? Do you like to pray? Do you pray? Do you pursue after Jesus through prayer? Do you pursue after the Word of God because you get more of Jesus through the Word of God? Do you say, "I need Jesus, I want Jesus," whereas your life tells a different story in not showing your pursuit. Our hearts are always alive, so we are always in pursuit of something. Our hardest pursuit always has to be for more of Jesus. This church says, "I am rich, prosperous and need nothing." We should say, "our richness is Jesus Christ and our prosperity is in our spiritual prosperity in having more of Jesus. I need nothing *else* except for Jesus and I am desperately in need for more of Him." Always check your heart. How is your spirituality? One of the easiest ways to check your heart is by asking yourself, "do I want Jesus and do I need Jesus right now?"

### **III. Jesus counsels [18-20]**

<sup>18</sup>*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. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup>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.*

**A. Buy from Jesus [18]**

<sup>18</sup>*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 is saying to them, “You are poor. Buy three things from me- gold, white garments, and salve.” They could only buy these necessities by grace, as they are so poor and cannot buy anything. God tells them to receive from His hands, even as He buys it by His own blood.

*Isaiah 55:1* – “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

He says, “I am going to buy whatever you need spiritually with my blood.”

Revelation 3:18 refers to three items which the Laodiceans took pride in- gold (financial wealth), white garments (their extensive textile industry), and salve (an eye medicine). We examine each of these items more closely.

*1 Peter 1:7* – *so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The spiritual meaning of ‘gold’ used here is gold refined by fire. It is the test of genuineness of faith. On the Judgment Day when everything is burned, only what we do for Christ will remain. Gold is the bowl of our hearts, and our character and likeness of Christ, in addition to how much we have lived for Christ. Our gold is simply our genuine relationship with Christ, while white garment means pure garment. The righteousness of Christ through our faith and His blood will cover us, as we are otherwise naked in our sins. Salve utilization here implies spiritually blind and unable see God. Unlike what the Laodiceans knew and prided themselves in, we must understand that Jesus is the answer – the spiritual gold, garment, and vision. What makes us rich, is Christ our treasure and nothing else.

*Revelation 1: 13-14* – <sup>13</sup>*and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,*

**B. Be zealous and repent [19]**

<sup>19</sup>*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*

Just as you are zealous about other things, be zealous and repent. Repent means turning around from pursuing other things, like Gold, to pursue Christ. Do not pursue after the garment but pursue after Christ who clothed you with the righteousness of Christ. Do not pursue the salve but Christ who heals us and makes us see what is treasurable and

valuable. Do not pursue after the world but pursue after Christ. Do not pursue what satisfies your sin nature but pursue what satisfies your spiritual nature.

He says, ‘those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.’ Hence, although they receive the harshest rebuke, they still have a chance. When you are not in hell, no matter what words of rebuke you receive or what you go through on this earth, you still have a chance in Him. Listen and Love, as it is a blessing to hear from God, to turn around. It is His grace and a blessing.

### **C. Hear His voice and open the door [20]**

<sup>20</sup>*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.*

This verse is often misinterpreted and used as an evangelical tool to non-believers. Not that it is not okay to use it like that, as non-believers need to open their hearts too, but this verse was given to believers and churchgoers. Jesus was outside their door but it was a dead and useless church. Individually speaking, Jesus was knocking at the door of their hearts. How do you buy gold, garments, and salve when you are poor, naked, and blind? Well, this verse is saying that you do not have to go out to get it, but you just have to invite Jesus in. You do not need to search because He is already searching for, and in pursuit of you. All you need to do is turn around.

In Jerry McGuire, an old sports and romantic comedy movie, Jerry McGuire was a struggling sports agent, unsure of his love for a certain lady. They separate for a while to check whether they really were in love. He eventually realizes how much he loved her and gave her a wonderful speech about how he achieved great success but was unhappy because he did not have anyone to share it with. She was the one he wanted to share the biggest news of his life with. He turns around and goes to the city she resides and utters the famous line, “You complete me,” but that is not my point here. I want to talk about her response afterwards in saying, “You had me at hello.” That is what God is like to us. Sometimes we run away or separate from Him only to come back and realize God’s love for us. When we turn to Him and want to give Him a great prayer to return, Jesus says, “You had me at hello.” He is constantly pursuing, and the one who is knocking at the door. He is the one who came to Adam when he was running away saying, “Where are you?” He is the one who came to this earth to pursue after the sinners that betrayed Him, dying for us on the cross. As soon as the propensity of your heart is towards the cross, you already have Him. He will come in and eat with you and your life will immediately be different. You can never run too far for His reach and you can never sin too much.

### **IV. Jesus promises [21-22]**

<sup>21</sup>*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.* <sup>22</sup>*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

These promises are always true in a small way when we get closer to the Lord. But when we see Him face to face in Heaven, this will come to the full fruition. It says, “*I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,*” implying that Christ will delegate some of His ruling authority to His people.

**Luke 19:17** – *And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’*

Heaven is a place of joy but also a place of service and responsibilities. Some lazy people may think, 'I just want to relax in Heaven.' However, everybody is diligent about what they truly love. For example, some college students are lazy about studying but are amazingly diligent with playing video games. Without a sin nature, you will just want to serve other people and do things in service to Christ. Heaven is a place of joy through serving Christ and others.

*1 Corinthians 6:3 – Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

It says we have some authority in the heavenly realm. Of course, right now angels are above, because we are sinful beings. God uses angels to serve us. But when we get to Heaven and we are sinless, we will be above angels.

*2 Timothy 2:12 – if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;*

Some sort of authority is obviously received. Yes, we can receive this spiritual authority and blessings as we continuously grow now. We need to grow right now in our hearts, and in faith, and in our need to hear the Word of God, to be delegated with responsibility to serve the Lord and reign with Him. Verse 22 says, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' As we read Scripture, the Holy Spirit uses the words to make us see the true reality of what is happening – the spiritual reality that is far deeper and infinitely greater than one can imagine. The longer I live, the more I realize how much I know not. I have been studying the Bible for 30 years, yet I feel like I only know a dinky amount of the reality of eternity described therein. The Word of God has an infinite amount of treasure in each verse and there is nothing that gives me more of Jesus than the Bible. What a privilege it is that I am called to preach because I would not study the Bible nearly as much if I was not called to teach it. As I go through each verse, it goes through me and it clothes me with His righteousness. Each verse I read is a garment I will wear for eternity. Each passage I meditate on heals me and makes me realize more that I was blind but now I see. Jesus is my gold, my garment, and my salve.

### **Conclusion: TO and THROUGH**

We do not want to finish with 'Dead Church,' so here is some hope to conclude the series.

#### **To-**

As I thought about the seven churches and what Jesus said to them, I realized that He is absolutely committed to the Church of Jesus Christ. He is walking in the midst of us, we are in His hands and He is absolutely committed to the Church individually as well as corporately. For those that are leaving, make sure you go to a local church and be faithful in it. Become a helpful member to whatever local church you go to. Do not be critical! Please, understand that anything different will require a perhaps hard initial adjustment.

Permit me to draw your attention to a little bit of strangeness in the initial address in verse 14. Usually, when His name is mentioned in the opening, it is quite obvious why, as one examines the content. However, here, it is not immediately apparent why His name is used the way it is in the verse, 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.' Nevertheless, closely examine Revelation 1:5 which says, 'from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.' Perhaps, Jesus is thinking about 'the firstborn of the dead' in reference to verse 14, when He says 'the beginning of God's creation.' That is, in the New Testament after the death and resurrection, Jesus is the beginning of God's *new* creation, as God

himself was the beginning in the Old testament. In addition, I believe that the point of mentioning 'to Him who loved us and freed us from our sin by His blood,' is that He lovingly wants to bless and resurrect His dead church and its spiritually dying individuals. There is hope as long as you are alive. The death of one leads to the revival of many and the resurrection of us all.

If I give you a \$20 bill you may accept it regardless of how bad it looks. Similarly, in Christ, we have value because a higher authority has declared us so. The \$20 bill may have been used in the past to buy drugs, pay for a prostitute, cheat, etc., yet it retains its inherent value. No matter what you have done in the past, in Jesus Christ your value does not depend on your past, but on the present- the presence of Christ. Because Jesus is in you, you are valuable. No matter what we have done, we can be forgiven, we can be used again redemptively for the glory of Jesus Christ. Importantly, remember that He is committed to you according to these letters.

### **Through-**

*Mathew 16:18 – And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Christ is committed to each of us individually to use us in expanding His kingdom and to build the church of Jesus Christ to change the world. We are part of His 'through.' We are the means, the agents, and the instruments of God. This commitment of His to fulfill His promises through the Church of Jesus Christ will never die. On a side note, it may cross your mind that none of these churches still exist today. Permit me to explain this with the tale of Romeo and Juliet – two young teenagers from opposing families that fell in love. The disapproval of families and a resulting desire to escape an arranged wedding made Juliet to devise a plan to drink a potion on her wedding night that will send herself into a deep, death-like coma for several hours. She sent a letter to Romeo explaining her plan, but the letter never got to its destination. Romeo, not knowing that she was only in a death-like coma, saw her as dead and felt he had no more reason to live. He drank poison and died. Juliet then wakes up to see Romeo dead and felt she had no reason to live as well, hence fatally stabbing herself with a dagger. I wonder how they could have had an alternative end involving a happily after? There are two possible solutions. First, if the misunderstanding did not happen, and if the letter arrived, they would not have killed themselves. Second, if Romeo had the power to resurrect Juliet from death, they would have lived happily ever after.

We do have a love story in the Gospel between Christ and the Church, but we have one greater than Romeo with the power to resurrect the dead church and its people. We can come alive and be in a love relationship together. In the final novel in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis said, "All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." Greater things are ahead for those who are in Jesus Christ. Above all, how can we now explain that none of these churches exist today? Well, how about the fact that there is CFC, TCBC, Vineyard, Windsor Road, etc. These are churches that exist because Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The sustenance of God's local church may be conditional dependent on the faithfulness of human beings, but the sustenance of God's universal church is conditional to His faithfulness, hence unconditional and eternal. God's redemptive history will carry on. Knowing that it will go on with or without you, do you want to be a part of it? I do not know about you, but I want to be a part of it. I want to open my heart to receive Him, so that I can be useful for the kingdom and live for His glory.