

"Laodicea: I Stand at the Door and Knock"

This passage is famous for the image of Jesus knocking on the door of our lives. What is less well known is that the imagery of knocking on the door here seems to be drawn from the Old Testament love poem, the *Song of Solomon*. In **Song of Solomon 5** scholars differ on whether there is a dream being remembered or a poetic description of something that happened. When Revelation was written the most popular version of the Song of Solomon was the Greek translation and in **Song of Solomon 5:2** it says this: *the voice of my beloved, he knocks on the door. Open to me, my beloved*". The *voice*, the *knock*, the *door* the call to *open*, it's all there just as it is here in Revelation.

What happens in this part of the Song of Solomon is that when he knocks she thinks to herself; I'm already in bed, I washed my feet and I don't want them to get dirty on the floor, so she doesn't get up. But then she hears his hand on the latch and that gets to her heart. She decides to get up after all but when she gets to the door he has gone. She goes out wandering the streets looking for him, and has a nightmarish experience because she runs into the watchmen who beat and bruise her and unveil her to see who she is. At the end (**verse 8**) she's back home alone and she says, *if you find my beloved, you tell him, I am sick with love*. That story can help us think about this passage. Someone is knocking. He wants to be with the one he loves but for trivial reasons there is a half-hearted response. In the end that response or lack of is deeply regretted. In each of the seven letters that begin the book of Revelation there is a focus or theme that all Christians need to hear. The theme in this letter has to do with how and why we respond to Jesus and open the door to him.

The first thing it tells us is that...

I. JESUS IS THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS: WE NEED TO LISTEN TO HIM.

Verse 14 begins with the words: *"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. The word "Amen" is used to express the fact that what has been said is reliable and will be. Then, "the beginning of God's creation" establishes his authority. He is the author of it all – that's what it means.*

He knows the truth of what it is all about. If you want to know about life and purpose and happiness or sex and marriage or true spirituality, how to receive forgiveness, the power of prayer, the supremacy of love and what matters most, *listen to him*. He is faithful and true witness.

Notice

A. He sometimes tells us hard truths.

Look at **verses 15-16**. *“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.”* It's sometimes thought this means it better to be a cold unbeliever than to be a half-hearted Christian. That seems unlikely. It's hard to believe Jesus would say it is better to be lost, hostile, completely cold toward God than to be a less than passionate child of God.

There's a better way to understand this. The best commentaries point out that two cities close to Laodicea were famous for their water for different reasons. One, Hierapolis, had hot springs that were considered therapeutic for bathing. The other, Colossae, had cold springs that yielded refreshing drinking water. Laodicea had to pipe in water from a distance through aqueducts. The Laodicean water picked up nauseating mineral deposits and it was lukewarm when it reached the town. So the point is that there is more than one way to be good; you may be refreshing like cool water for the spiritually weary or comforting and healing like hot water for the spiritually sick. But the hard truth is Jesus sometimes tells us that we aren't good in either way. We aren't helping or healing anyone much less pleasing God. Look at **verse 17** It says, *For (in other words, this is why I call you luke warm) you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* Sometimes we need a hard word from Jesus to tell us what we haven't seen much less admitted to ourselves. That we are not doing well, we are not strong and self-sufficient we are desperately needy for him.

Notice in **verse 17** the difference between what they say about themselves and the truth that Jesus reveals about them. I heard a talk recently that discussed a study done of several countries regarding their math skills. In this study the American students scored the lowest on math skills and the Koreans the highest. However in terms of self-evaluation the Americans had the highest scores on how they felt about their math abilities and the Koreans had the lowest.

I'm not trying to pile on to America but I do want to illustrate that your self-evaluation doesn't always match reality. Jesus is the faithful and true witness: we need to listen to him.

B. He speaks hard truths out of great love

Look at **verse 19**, *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline*. True love sometimes has larger concerns than hurt feelings. Jesus shows us the truth because he loves us. Look at what he wants for us. **Verse 20**, he wants to come into our lives to have friendship and relationship with us. Look at **verses 21-22**, He wants us to conquer in life just as he conquered in grace and truth overcoming every enemy, obstacle, trial and temptation. He wants *us* - *us* to share his glory on the last day and to rule with him in his kingdom with the Father! His desire and purpose for us is gracious and good. So listen to him.

Application: Will you listen? Jesus will speak truth to you if you will listen to him. Read the Bible, listen to honest preaching, be part of a group in which you discuss Scripture and its application to life you will be hearing truth. That's how you listen but that's not all there is to listening. Let me put it negatively to *not* listen you just read the Bible, hear it taught and even study and discuss it but don't put yourself under its authority or yield to and obey its teachings or rely on its promises. To *not listen* just don't submit to your will to God's word. Listen, Jesus shows us the truth because he loves us.

Jesus is the faithful and true witness we need to listen to him. That's how this part of Revelation opens. Here's what it goes on to say.

II. JESUS HAS THE TRUE RICHES: WE NEED TO GET THEM FROM HIM.

Look at **verse 18**; Laodicea was famous for gold, garments, and health care. It was a prosperous town. It would have shown up on one of those internet BuzzFeed type articles on the ten best cities to live in. So the words of Jesus use the strength of that culture, the most appealing, things in that place to highlight the truth that no matter what the world offers the true riches come from him.

A. Jesus has what we need.

1. Jesus says, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich. There is nothing wrong with money in itself. We are all naturally concerned with it. It has the potential to do good.

But it can also seduce, corrupt, and enslave us. When Jesus says, *buy from me gold refined by fire*, He is telling you to find your deepest riches in him. The Bible uses the word riches to describe the immaterial riches God gives us: the riches of God's grace and the riches of His love and the riches of our inheritance in Christ. God has promised to meet all the needs of his children out of the abundance of his riches. You have to know and believe Jesus is the good shepherd and say, *The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.*" He has the true and lasting riches.

2. The second thing he tells us to get from him is white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness. Long before psychologists saw it, the Bible said it: a big part of the human condition is a struggle to cover up a sense of shame. We work hard and worry about our accomplishments, our record, our looks, and our trophies. Like Adam and Eve we try to find some fig leaf to cover our vulnerability. What is the white garment? That's the image the Bible uses for the idea of God clothing us in the righteousness of Jesus. Christ died to pay for all our sins and when we trust him, he forgives us all and everything. But he does even more than that. He not only cleanses us of our sins, he clothes us with the perfect righteous life of Jesus. God looks at us and sees us in Jesus Christ.

3. The third thing we get from Christ is sight: salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Of all my senses I would hate losing my sight the most. How much do you value your sight? What if you think you are seeing but your seeing it all wrong? What if you are *not* seeing the truth, the way God sees? What if what seems smart is foolish and what looks good is bad? You need Christ to open your eyes.

I remember an old farmer in a church in rural Missouri telling about when and how he came to ask Christ into his life and trust him as his Savior. We were driving in his car and he gestured out the window at the farm fields and the treeline and said this whole world looked different to me the next morning. The Bible says the blind will see. Jesus gives us the spiritual vision to see clearly, our sins, his love, each other as brother and what matters. This sweet strong old man he had battled hard times and heart disease, weathered droughts and floods and lost crops and started over but he had something precious, a spiritual rebirth that enabled him to see it all with faith's clarity.

Jesus has what we need most...

B. We have to open the door to him.

Verse 19 says, *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* **Verse 20** takes that call to repent and puts it in the form of a picture, *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.* So notice the order. It doesn't say, repent and then be zealous as if zeal is the main point. It says *be zealous and repent. Behold, I'm at the door.* It's not talking about repentance leading to zeal but a zeal for repentance leading us to open the door to Jesus! Remember Song of Solomon? The woman has trivial reasons for not going to the door and as a result she misses the one she loves and the one who loves her. So the idea is be zealous and repent and open the whole of your life and personality to Christ.

1. There is an invitation here for someone who has never come to Christ. I know more than one person who became Christians because of this verse. One said he was a young man going to church and believing in Christ in a very indifferent way but one time some one showed him this verse and asked him, *"On what side of the door is Jesus Christ in your life?"* He said it never occurred to him that Jesus might be on the outside knocking and that he had to do something. He had to open the door and ask him in, trusting in him. If you are here and you have never done anything like, intentionally opening the door of your life to Jesus then that would be the first and most important way to apply this passage to your life.

2. However, the primary point here is for you who are Christians. This is a letter to a church a community of believers. This passage pictures Christians who are not inviting Jesus into their whole life and personality. He has some sort of place in their life - he's on the doorstep - but they aren't welcoming him into the heart of the home, and finding in him their true wealth, covering, and healing. In an amazing act of loving condescension he keeps knocking. If we will open the whole life and personality up to him he will enrich us, and clothe us, and heal us and we will see clearly.

Where do you stand in all of this? Ask yourself some questions.
What do you feel most strongly about?
What are you most ready to fight about?
What do you work the hardest at?
What do you invest the most thinking, effort and money on?
What do you worry about the most?
What do you grieve over most deeply?

Of course we feel deeply about many things and that is normal. It is not as if there is a metric or standard that measures our emotions and by that we have to register the highest marks for Jesus. But, if we *only* feel strongly about our jobs, our pride, our stuff, our bodies, our popularity then those things probably are the things we're depending on to enrich our lives, to cover our shame and to bring us healing. That's what the Laodiceans were doing. Jesus was outside the functional center of their lives. What you are looking for in these questions is the truth about where you look for your treasure, how you compensate for your shame and how you seek your healing, and ultimately whether Christ is on the inside sharing life with you from an honored place of deep relationship or whether, for all practical purposes, even if you are a Christian, he is on the door step but not at the table at the heart of where we live. Get up and open to him.

CONCLUSION

I was thinking about this looking for some examples to help me to communicate and I remembered two things that stirred up my thinking and emotions this week. The first was someone gave me some advice I didn't think I needed. It bothered me. It was friendly but why did that person think I needed that advice? The other was someone told a story about me that was not accurate or positive. I was bothered because in this situation there was no way for me to go back and set the record straight. That bugged me. We can just dismiss all that as insignificant and human but what I realized is that the reason those everyday interactions bugged me out of all proportion is because I still sometimes try to cover the shame of my vulnerability with my own record of good performance and competence. In that moment I'm not resting in the white robe of salvation and acceptance that Jesus has given me, thankful for his grace. I'm not enjoying the presence of Jesus who is offering relationship to me. Over and over in moments like that with emotions like that I have to turn back to him.

That's true repentance. In repentance we turn decisively from everything we know to be wrong and empty and in faith we open the door of our whole life and personality to Christ as our Lord and Savior, our true wealth, covering, and healing. We welcome him into our poverty and emptiness to fill us with his presence and power. As we ask him to come in like that faith is believing and trusting him to do as he promises. He is *the Amen the faithful and true witness*, listen to him.

Amen