

FIND & FOLLOW 2022
Seven Letters
Revelation 2-3

The book of the Revelation is a remarkable book, unlike any other in the New Testament. It has elements however that are very reminiscent of the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel. It is both GLORIOUS and MYSTERIOUS. It clearly portrays the Lord Jesus as the Sovereign Ruler of all mankind and the Risen Conqueror whose reign will ultimately be fully realized in all of the earth. The book contains ENCOURAGEMENT and WARNINGS that have value for believers throughout the Church Age, but it is also clearly a PROPHETIC description of events that are YET TO BE fulfilled on the earth, using some very strange and exciting (or terrifying) imagery. Its primary FOCUS is on the events immediately preceding and following the 2nd Coming of Christ to the earth.

Today, we will be learning about the letters that John wrote to 7 churches in Asia Minor. [We have divided these up between our 3 campuses to let us dig a bit deeper in each one. Listen to the others on our website later this week if you want to learn about all 7 churches!]. I will be focusing on the letters to the churches of Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. John's words to them apply to SPECIFIC situations in those churches at that time, but they contain PRINCIPLES that can easily be APPLIED to ALL churches in every time period! They also contain PROPHETIC PROMISES that can motivate us as well.

Almost all of these seven letters have both a COMMENDATION and then a REBUKE. In two of the three that we will study today, only one has something to commend! What a heartbreaking thought that Christ could only REBUKE some of the churches that existed in his name! Such is the case for the Church at Sardis:

SARDIS – THE DYING CHURCH THAT NEEDS TO WAKE UP! Revelation 3:1-6 NIV

1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. **I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.** 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. 4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. 6 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Every letter BEGINS with a reminder of the One that is speaking. There is no greater weight or hope for any church than knowing that Christ is speaking to them!

[The Seven Spirits of God is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Seven is the number of completeness. This is not saying that there are seven DIFFERENT Spirits, but they reflect the manifold (or complete) expression of the Holy Spirit on this earth. Isaiah 11:2 may explain it a bit by saying that the Holy Spirit is the 1)Spirit of the Lord, 2)Spirit of wisdom, 3)of understanding, 4)of counsel, 5)of might, 6)of the Knowledge of the Lord, 7)of the Fear of the Lord.]

Can you imagine being a member of the church in Sardis that received and read this letter for the first time? That would make anyone TREMBLE! The Lord is speaking DIRECTLY to his people in that church and telling them that he KNOWS their deeds. He is watching all that they do. *The same is true for us today; he is carefully watching his people here at Colonial Hills. What does he see here and what would he say to US?* **The Church at Sardis had a REPUTATION of being ALIVE.** To the world around them, it looked like a place of LIFE and HEALTH. I am sure that it was bustling with ACTIVITY and had a number of important PROGRAMS. But it was DEAD. Is this not a picture of so many church congregations in our world today? They may be busy, but there is NO spiritual LIFE evident when you step into their fellowship. The Spirit of God is GRIEVED by this. Furthermore, the Lord says that the church's "*deeds were unfinished.*" This implies that their obedience was INCOMPLETE. They were only PARTLY obeying the Lord. This is in contrast to how Jesus always FINISHES what he starts in us [**Philippians 1:6**]. Several times in the New Testament, believers are COMMENDED for FINISHING the work that God set them out to do. [John the Baptist – Acts 13:25; Paul – Acts 14] *If Jesus is truly involved in what we are doing as a church, then the work will be carried out to the FULL completion of its purpose!* And Jesus does NOT RELEASE us from what he commanded us to do even when it gets difficult. FINISH STRONG. [1 out of 10)

The perspectives and praise of MEN are nothing compared with the APPROVAL of GOD. It does not really MATTER what the people around you or your church think about how good you are or how spiritual you are. Only God knows the heart. We often DECEIVE ourselves by basking in the PRAISES of men rather than seeking the APPROVAL of God. We can feel good about what we are doing in his name, even when we are doing it without the help of his Spirit or the power of his presence!

It is also noteworthy that there is no mention of persecution or pushback from the enemy against the church in Sardis. If the church was not a THREAT to the kingdom of Satan, then Satan's forces had no need to fight against them! *Is it possible that a good reputation among the surrounding peoples existed because the OFFENSE of the GOSPEL was never a source of CONTROVERSY with this church?* If you are not actively presenting the Gospel to people in your city, then they are not confronted with their own sinfulness and need of a Savior, and the enemies of God are not worried about you!

The Church is told to WAKE UP and STRENGTHEN that which is still remains and is alive. They were not totally dead, but MOSTLY dead, and the life in them was on LIFE SUPPORT! Like many churches today, the church as a body is dead, but there are

MEMBERS within that still have a beating heart for God and for his Word and work. But they are the only hope for that church. **You have a few people that have not stained their clothes.** The people that give ANY church real HOPE are the people who truly love Jesus and are HUNGRY for God to work no matter how dead the church they are in may be! I have been in churches before that were simply VOID of life, but there were some there that made every service and event worthwhile, and who made FELLOWSHIP sweet. Oh, that the church would follow the lead of people like this and not push them to the side! **Revelation 3:4-6 The Message**

⁴ "You still have a few followers of Jesus in Sardis who haven't ruined themselves wallowing in the muck of the world's ways. They'll walk with me on parade! They've proved their worth! ⁵ "Conquerors will march in the victory parade, their names indelible in the Book of Life. I'll lead them up and present them by name to my Father and his Angels. ⁶ "Are your ears awake? Listen.

There must be an URGENCY in the body to properly respond to this stunning rebuke! Waking up requires that those who are truly believers, but are not walking in close fellowship and obedience to God, REMEMBER what God had revealed to them when they were first saved, that they RE-GRIP that truth and guard it in their hearts and minds, and then REPENT of the sin that led them away from God in the first place!

PHILIDELPHIA – THE LITTLE CHURCH WITH A MIGHTY HEART.

Revelation 3:7-13 NIV

⁷ "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. **I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.** ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. ¹³ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

These are the words of him who holds the key of David, who opens and shuts doors that no one else can open or shut. God loves to open doors that no one else can open for those that will walk through them! **Has God ever opened a door for you?**

I know your deeds, that you have a LITTLE strength . . . This is such an encouraging word! Apparently, this church was small in size. Their "little strength" is often interpreted as strength that has been SPENT on endurance; not a lack of strength!

And don't let SIZE fool you! No matter how SMALL a church may be or how insignificant she may FEEL, if that church is honoring Jesus and his word and holding true to his name, she CANNOT be STOPPED from accomplishing God's will! **God's word is full of stories about SMALL ARMIES who defeated a multitude of enemies and SMALL people who slew GIANTS!** I think that so often we let ourselves feel **insignificant** because we are not as BIG or RICH or FAMOUS as some other churches or people. But that is not how God works! He loves to open doors for churches that will not CLAIM GLORY for themselves when God does a magnificent work. Oh, that we would be the kind of church that INVITES God to open doors for his KINGDOM and HIS GLORY in Desoto County. **God does not determine our WORTH by our SIZE, but by our OBEDIENCE and our FAITHFULNESS!**

PROMISES TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIDELPHIA:

***I will make [evildoers] recognize MY LOVE for you!**" Any shame or criticism that had been heaped upon them will be completely ERASED by God when he makes his love abundantly evident to those PROUD LIARS [BULLIES] who mocked them before.

***I will keep you from the hour of trial that is to come on the whole world." (Vs. 10)**

This verse is seen by some scholars as a promise to the church that she will not have to undergo the GREAT TRIBULATION that will come upon the whole earth at the last day. This promise is made to those that PATIENTLY ENDURE trials and troubles for the sake of the Lord Jesus. I do believe that God's children will be RAPTURED before the Great Tribulation.

***I will make you a PILLAR in the house of my God.** This is a sign of STABILITY and STRENGTH. This church that felt so small and unimportant is made a SYMBOL of the ETERNAL MIGHT of the Lord Jesus in his kingdom. Jesus promises to "write his name upon them" as the MARK of his eternal covenant relationship with them. What an amazing thought. This is a HEAVENLY TATOO!

The FINAL CHALLENGE that Jesus gives to this church is that of encouraging them to HOLD ON to the VICTORY that they have so that no one will steal their crown. That crown is a REWARD for their faithful endurance, but it requires that we do not let down our guard or lose ground that God has allowed us to take!

LAODICEA – THE APATHETIC CHURCH THAT NEEDS TO SEE ITS DESPERATE CONDITION. Revelation 3:14-22 NIV

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. **I wish you were either one or the other!** 16 So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' **But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.** 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. 21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

KEY PROBLEMS IN LAODICEA:

***This church had no spiritual PASSION.** What a tragedy when a believer or a church family loses its sense of purpose and passion for God! The opposite of LOVE is NOT HATE; but it is INDIFFERENCE. The church at Laodicea had reached that point in its spiritual life.

***This church VALUED the WRONG things.**

"You say, 'I am rich . . .'" How could they say this? How do we often do the same thing? We value COMFORT and physical PROSPERITY over OBEDIENCE and spiritual VITALITY. We confuse EARTHLY BLESSINGS with HEAVENLY POWER and USEFULNESS.

***This church was self-deceived.**

-They were MISERABLE and PITIFUL. They pretended to be full of joy and life, but they were inwardly in MISERY. Like a wealthy person who cannot sleep, has no true friends, and stays on drugs to keep a false high. Furthermore, their spiritual "performance" was like an embarrassing episode of AMERICAN IDOL. They thought they had a beautiful singing voice, when they really sounded like a dying animal!

-They were NAKED. They were not LIVING in the RIGHTEOUSNESS of CHRIST. They were cloaked in their own filthy rags of self-righteousness.

-They were BLIND. This is the most tragic part of the story: They could NOT SEE their own condition. [The LIGHT of the body is the EYE!] They were convinced that they were living their BEST LIFE NOW. Not so!

***This church was STILL LOVED by Jesus, even though their love for him had grown COLD!** Jesus said that he loves those that he rebukes and disciplines. This is a FATHER'S LOVE. The amazing thing is that EVERYTHING that they needed for RESTORATION was right BEFORE them in Christ; if only they would CLAIM IT. They had PURE GOLD and WHITE ROBES and HEALING SALVE all within reach. **Their healing however, could only happen through HUMILITY and REPENTANCE.** They could not just CONTINUE as they were. **I love how Jesus firmly rebukes them, and then GENTLY offers to re-establish fellowship with them if they will let him in!** The gentle and lowly Shepherd is once again lovingly caring for his sheep. He is not harsh and unforgiving. He is beautifully patient and kind. This church was in a DESPERATE condition, but there was ample hope for them to find the VICTORY that only comes by FAITH. They could be victorious just as their LORD and SAVIOR is victorious. Even at this LATE DATE, they could be restored to a place where they would

be granted great REWARDS in Jesus name. This could be true for anyone here today who may currently be apathetic and empty in their spiritual life. **Jesus is KNOCKING at your door and WAITING for you. Your move!**

Which church are we: Sardis, Philadelphia, or Laodicea? We cannot ASSUME the answer. The One who KNOWS our deeds will speak truth to us if we will hear it!

Let's pray.

FIND & FOLLOW 2022
December 4 – Olive Branch Facilitation Guide
Seven Letters – Revelation 3

Start talking

What is the most memorable letter you have ever received?

Start thinking.

What interests you most when you read Revelation?

Start sharing.

[Read Revelation 3:1-6](#). How could a church have a great reputation and solid doctrine but still not be vibrant and alive? What does Jesus tell this dying church to do to wake up, and what does that mean (Vs. 2-3)?

[Read Revelation 3:7-13](#). Talk about a time that God divinely opened or shut a door in your life. Why do we often confuse strength with size, and why is this church's endurance stunning in light of its small stature?

[Read Revelation 3:14-22](#). Why is apathy so destructive to spiritual life? Why do you think this church was so self-deceived? Talk about Jesus's loving rebuke of this church and what it says about ways and his heart for his people.

Start praying.

Pray for spiritual protection and fresh passion for your pastors and fellow believers at Colonial Hills.

Start doing.

Answer this question: How would you describe your spiritual life right now, and what can make it stronger?