



REMOVING THE FEAR OF **REVELATION**

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever."

— Revelation 1:17-18 —

Date: 3-15-2026

Sermon: Reputation, Faithfulness, and Lukewarm Faith

Text: Revelation 3

If Jesus evaluated our church... what would He say?

In Revelation 3 we see three very different churches.

One that **looks alive but is spiritually dying.**

One that **looks weak but is deeply faithful.**

And one that **looks prosperous but is completely useless.**

Revelation 3



Sardis - Just Going Through the _____

Revelation 3:1-6 NLT

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars:

“I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first;

hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.

"Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine.

"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

Notes:

Commentary:

The city of Sardis, the old capital of Lydia, had become famous for its red dye and woolen goods. Twice in its history it had been conquered—by Cyrus, in 549 b.c., and by Antiochus the Great, in 218 b.c.—because of failing to keep adequate watch. It may be with allusion to this historical fact that Jesus exhorted the church to **be watchful** (v. 2) against the encroachment of sin which might conquer the church. The city was known for its immorality, and this may have made it more challenging for the Christians of the city to remain pure, since there were only **a few names**

even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments (v. 4). Tragically, this is one of the two churches (Laodicea being the other) which receive no commendation from the Lord.

The *historicists* and *some futurists* see Sardis as representing the church at the time of the Reformation (1517–1793). This extends from the time of Luther to that of Wesley. This movement ended the Dark Ages and brought refreshing signs of life to the church, though, it is said, Jesus did not find its works perfect before God. The Reformation went a certain distance in discarding unscriptural traditions and in restoring biblical authority in the church, but, in the opinion of some (e.g., the Anabaptists), they did not go far enough.

Philadelphia - A _____ Strength

Revelation 2:7-13 NLT

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia.

This is the message from the one who is holy and true,

the one who has the key of David.

What he opens, no one can close;

and what he closes, no one can open:

“I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. Look, I will force those who belong to Satan’s synagogue—those liars who say they are Jews but are not—to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love.

“Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write on them the name of my God, and they will be citizens in the city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name.

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

Notes:

Commentary:

The city of **Philadelphia** had a relatively small population in John’s day, due to the fear of earthquakes, with which the city was plagued.

Historically, the inhabitants had frequently been forced to move out of the city due to its instability. Philadelphia had been destroyed by earthquake in a.d. 17, and even though it had been rebuilt, many people still were fearful

about living in town and remained instead in the surrounding countryside. For this reason, the church there may have been small, though it remained a significant church in the region at least until the 12th century, and a small congregation is said to be in that location to this day.

Dispensational futurists find in this statement a promise of the pre-tribulation Rapture. Taking the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world to be suggestive of a global crisis, it is thought that this refers to a future tribulation period. Since Jesus promises to keep [the church] from this terrible time, it is argued that the church must be removed from the earth prior to the tribulation of the last days. However, this passage is capable of alternative interpretations.

Those of other approaches would not agree that the “hour of trial” is to be identified with a period of a few years at the close of history. Even if this identification is allowed, however, it is far from clear that the removal of Christians from the earth would be the only possible way in which Jesus could keep His people from the wars and plagues anticipated to occur at that time. For example, Jesus prayed thus for His disciples: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). The words “keep ... from” in the latter verse are the same Greek words (*ek tēreō*) that are found here in Revelation. Nondispensationalists argue that “keeping from” does not require removal from the planet, since Jesus specified that His prayer was not that the disciples be taken out of the world.

To the **idealist**, the time of trial is generic. All people the world over experience times of trial. From time to time in history there are multinational conflicts and crises that threaten the peace and safety of believers as well as unbelievers. Through all such trials, the believer, who has kept faith with the Lord, is secure in God’s care.

Preterists argue that an empire-wide crisis would satisfy the normal use of the terminology in Revelation 3:10. The whole world is a term used to designate the Roman Empire in Luke 2:1 and elsewhere. That it is to test

those who dwell on the earth (or “land,” i.e., Israel) may suggest that there is a crisis that will shake the whole empire and put the Jews, in particular, into special peril. In A.D. 68, the death of Nero, and the civil wars that followed, greatly threatened the stability of the Roman Empire, until Vespasian was made emperor in A.D. 70. During this same period (A.D. 66–70), the Jews were embroiled in a fight for the survival of their nation against the Romans ... which they lost. Preterism suggests that this judgment on Jerusalem is what is implied in the promise, I am coming quickly! (v. 11).

The church will weather the storm, but the Christians will have to hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (v. 11). The overcomer will be made a pillar in the temple of My God (v. 12). Assuming a familiarity with the concept of the church being the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5), faithful confessors will possess positions of stability and support. Such pillars are earthquake-proof, so that, unlike the citizens of Philadelphia, who had frequently been driven out of their city by quakes, the overcomer shall go out no more. Three inscriptions will be written upon the believer who endures: (1) the name of My God, and (2) the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, and (3) My new name (v. 12). Having the name of God and of Christ written upon oneself is probably like a slave bearing the brand of his master. Further along, we will hear an angel expressing concern that the judgments not begin until “we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (7:3). Those thus sealed are later seen to have the “Father’s name written on their foreheads” (14:1)—a contrast to those who have the name/mark of the beast upon their foreheads (13:16ff). Such a mark on the believer is not a visible tattoo, but the seal of God’s ownership, a concept Paul equates with the believer’s possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The writing of the New Jerusalem upon the believer suggests citizenship there (cf. Ps. 87:5–6). This Jerusalem is described in symbolic detail in chapter 21.

In the systems of the historicists and some futurists, Philadelphia is taken to be the church at the time of the Great Awakening (from 1793) and beyond. This began with the era of Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, Finney, and Moody, whose activities ranged from the early 18th to the late 19th

centuries. The “open door” that Christ had placed before this church refers to the great opportunity for evangelistic harvesting. This period will continue until the return of Christ, overlapped in the latter days by the Laodicean period.

Laodicea - A _____ Faith

Revelation 3:14-22 NLT

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”

Notes:

Commentary:

Laodicea, by all accounts a very prosperous city in John’s day, was noteworthy on a number of counts. It was a banking center, which is obviously related to its general wealth. Laodicea also was a producer of black wool clothing and carpets. The city was the location of a famous medical school and the producer of a powder substance used to treat ailments of the eye.

The city’s water supply originated from hot springs six miles away at Denizli. In the process of traveling through the aqueduct to Laodicea, the water became tepid—neither hot nor cold. Allusions to these local distinctives may be detected in Christ’s choice of words used to address **the church of the Laodiceans** (v. 14).

The state of the church in Laodicea was one of self-satisfaction and complacency. Apparently the Christians, like the city itself, enjoyed a high degree of comfort and prosperity—a factor that led to a diminished zeal for the things of God. The letter to the Laodiceans shares with Sardis the unhappy distinction of lacking any commendation from the Lord.

Among *historicists* and some *futurists*, it is generally argued that Laodicea represents the lukewarm sector of the church in the end times (possibly beginning near the end of the nineteenth century). The scholarly assault on

the Bible, epitomized and exacerbated by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), put tremendous pressure upon the church to conform to modern thought or lose academic respectability. Many theologians succumbed to this pressure and began subjecting the Bible to "scientific methods" of analysis. Such analysis, though far from objective or conclusive, became fashionable in many seminaries and denominations, resulting in a loss of respect for the Bible as a genuine revelation from God. In many cases, secular psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and whatever social trend became popular in secular thinking (e.g., the breakdown of biblical models of marriage and sexuality), have displaced the Bible in its authority to dictate norms for the church. Modern churches that have gone this route are said to be represented by this Laodicean church. They are lukewarm, and Christ says that they nauseate him. Those applying the seven church letters to eras of church history believe that both the Philadelphian and the Laodicean types of church will exist together until the coming of Christ.

Having considered what the Spirit had to say to each of the seven churches individually, we are prepared to proceed to the main theater, where the pageant of heavenly scenes of later developments is presented for the edification of all seven of the churches—and, as we think, of the entire church of all times, as their symbolic number doubtless suggests.

Application:

Jesus is still speaking.

Jesus is still calling.

Jesus is still inviting His people back.

To Sardis He says: Wake up. Remember. Repent.

To Philadelphia He says: Hold fast.

To Laodicea He says: Repent and open the door.

When Jesus evaluates our lives, will He find reputation... or faithfulness?

Study Questions – Revelation 3

1. Bible Study – Sardis and Laodicea

In Revelation 3:1–6 and 3:14–22, Jesus exposes churches that look healthy on the outside but are spiritually weak or indifferent.

What specific problems does Jesus identify in these churches, and what instructions does He give them to return to spiritual life?

2. Bible Study – Philadelphia

In Revelation 3:7–13, Jesus commends the church in Philadelphia even though they have “little strength.”

What does this passage teach about what Jesus values most in a church and in His followers?

3. Application

Looking at the three churches (Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea), which warning or encouragement do you think is most important for Christians today—and why?