Revelation 3 - Letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

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Revelation chapter three. Open your Bible there, please. We're going to get into it here tonight, and I hope we're going to be able to cover the last three churches of the letters that are written here.

All right let's pray. Father, as we open up our hearts, open up our Bibles, open up our minds to the things that you have laid out here in the Book of Revelation, we just open, Lord, our desire to hear from you. We need you. We long for your Word. We long for Truth. Lord, you are the God of Truth. Your Word is True and how we need Your Truth every single day, Lord, just do a work to speak to each heart tonight. We give you this time. Lord I present to you also the study that I've put in on these chapters once again, and I just offer it up to you, Father, that you will use it for your Glory. Your glory, Your Honor, and for the edification of your people. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.

All right. We're beginning tonight here in chapter three with the letter from the Lord to the church in Sardis. Let me start by showing you where that church is located. Putting a map up on the screen there for you.

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I've circled Sardis for you. A little information here quickly. At this time, the time when this letter was written, Sardis was a very wealthy city, but not as wealthy as it had been in the past. It connected several trade routes. It had some vital highways coming in and out of it, which made for a port for easy money. And like Thyatira, it was also a commercial center for woolens and clothing. Also known for coloring and tinting of cloth as Thyatira also was.

The city, it's interesting, we've been hearing about all these earthquakes, in Turkey. This has been going on, you guys, for a long time. Do you know that the city of Sardis actually suffered a devastating earthquake in AD 17?

And the Romans came in and rebuilt the city because it was such an important port city and so many people coming in and out of there. Unfortunately, after it was devastated and then rebuilt, it really never regained its former glory. The city of Sardis was built on a mountain. It was really high up above the regular plane, and it was considered to be impregnable by an advancing army or enemy that might come against it.

And the people who lived there essentially believed that they were safe from any possible army that might come against it. Interestingly enough, but in its history, the city was twice breached simply because the occupants weren't being

watchful. In other words, they considered their city so impregnable that they really didn't feel like they needed to be very diligent or vigilant is maybe a better word, in keeping watch. And they would sit back and just kind of go, you know, nobody's getting in here. And because of that, people found a way. Two different armies found a way and actually took the city simply because the people weren't being alert and watchful. I want you to remember that because that's going to play into how we understand what the Lord is speaking to us through this letter.

Finally, it's just interesting to know that Sardis was the home of an Asian mother, goddess who was said to have the power to restore people from the dead. And that will also figure into some of the comments that the Lord makes in this letter. So keep those things in mind. Here we go.

Verse one, "*And to the angel slash Messenger is what that can also mean of the church Sardis write the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Jesus says, I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead*."

Okay, I want you to stop there for just a moment. Now as we, I want to talk a little bit about how Jesus introduces himself to this church. We talked in the very first study you might remember about this reference to the Seven Spirits of God.

And it is kind of a challenging one, not for the reason that John doesn't explain it and it is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture. You'll remember that I gave you essentially two possible explanations, I suppose, to what this means. Seven, as you know, is God's number of completeness. So many people believe that this is just another way of talking about the completeness of the person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The other explanation is, you'll recall, is expressed in the way the NIV renders this phrase, instead of the seven spirits they render it "*the sevenfold Spirit of God*," which may speak of seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit. Once again, we're not really sure because John doesn't explain it and it's nowhere else used.

Here's the deal though. The point of Jesus saying these things is to make, or to pass along, I guess, that he is the possessor of these things, and that is why he says the Words of Him who has, in other words, that's possessive. Who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, which are the seven angels or messengers of the seven churches.

Notice that Jesus is speaking in the possessive tense. I have these things, they belong to Me. And that's the point of what He's trying to convey to the church. As he goes on, you'll notice that his first message to this church is shortened to the point, I was going to say short and sweet, but it's really not very sweet.

He says, I know your works. And even though you have a reputation of being alive and even being fruitful, the fact of the matter is, you are dead. And that statement is both shocking and unsettling. But we need to remember that it's a statement that is being spoken by the One who sees into matters that we cannot see.

And that's always important. Jesus sees things that you and I can't see. We look at a church on the outside and it looks great. It looks alive. It looks like it's a happening place. The question is what does Jesus see when he looks at that church? And he's not explicitly telling us what caused the lifelessness of the church in Sardis, but we can deduce what those things may be from what he tells them to do.

Look at verses two and three. He says, "*2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you*."

Now, this tells us a lot right here. This gives us a lot of insight into what had caused this church to appear to be alive, but in fact be dead. And these are the what we call the five exertions to the church in Sardis. Let me put these up on the screen for you.

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Exhortations to the church at Sardis

1. **Wake Up**
2. **Strengthen what remains**
3. **Remember**
4. **Obey**
5. **Repent**

And they are these - wake up.

Wake up and remember the story I told you about two different armies that breached the city of Sardis because the people had allowed themself to be lulled into a false sense of security, and they literally became almost in a state of slumber concerning any sort of vigilance and keeping watch for the enemy.

You remember we're told concerning the enemy, "*Keep watch, see, be alert. Your enemy, the devil prowls around seeking whom he may devour."* (1Peter 5:8) We're to be alert. We've got to be watchful. So this church is being told to wake up. Wake up.

Secondly, he says, *strengthen what remains*. They had obviously lost some things and those things were gone. Think about that. Think about the things that we fritter away in our Christian life. Sometimes we fritter them away to our loss and they are gone and there's nothing we can do about it. But there's no use crying over it. He says, strengthen what remains what you've got left.

And then he tells them, thirdly to remember. And this obviously is what they had received and heard concerning the Gospel, the truth of who Jesus is, what he came to do for them, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and all the other things that they had received. He says, remember. Put these things back into mind.

Fourthly, and this always comes after remember. And that is, obey. Begin to walk in obedience to the Word of God. You have slacked off in this area of obeying the Lord what you know what's right now, remember it and walk it out, obey it.

And then lastly, he says, repent. Repent. He said, because there's a deadness. You appear to be alive, but you're dead. So repent. Isn't it interesting? Once again, remember I told you that there was an altar or a temple, actually to a goddess, who was said to raise the dead. And isn't it interesting that Jesus tells the people of Sardis, the believers of Sardis, there is deadness among you, but don't go looking to any goddess for help.

You look to me, but what is needed on your part? Repentance, turn away. That's what it means. Turn away from the things that you've been doing. Change direction. Go back. Come back to the Lord.

And I think these five exhortations are important for all of us to remember. Jesus goes on in verse four and he says, *"[4]Yet you still, or you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments."* Your Bible may say, *"they've not defiled their garments."*

And He says, [5] *"they will walk with me in white for they are worthy."* Here's the question. What does it take to soil your garment? What does it take to, well, let's start, let's even go back further than that. What are we talking about when we talk about your "garment?" Well, we know that we don't have any right to, wear our own garments before the Lord, right?

The Bible tells us that our most righteous acts are as filthy rags, (Isaiah 64:6) so my garments are filthy just because they're mine. And I'm a sinner. So, what Jesus does is He forgives my sin and then He gives me a garment to put on. It is literally the robe of righteousness. But here's what's fascinating. And that righteousness is His righteousness, and that's the way God sees me.

We sang about that tonight and that song the Lord sees me with the righteousness of His Son. But what we learn from this passage is that I can soil it. I can take that robe of righteousness that I've been given, and I can soil it through my actions, my impurities, and usually, a filthy garment or a soiled garment is a picture of compromise with impurity.

All right. So, you might remember this reference to soiled or dirty garments is given to us elsewhere in the Word of God. Remember when we were going through the Old Testament book of Zechariah? Let me show you this passage on the screen. It says,

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Zechariah 3:4

And the angels said to those who were standing before Him. "Remove the filthy garments from him." (**That's Zechariah or actually the individual he's referring to*****) "And to him, he said, behold, I have taken your iniquity from you and I will clothe you with pure vestments or pure garments or clothing."***

So, this is that same idea. We get an understanding of this picture of the soiling of garments.

Which we can do through our own sinful activity. So then Jesus gives a promise. In verse five, he says, [5] *"the One who conquers will be clothed, thus in white garments. And I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my father and before the angels. [6]He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

I want to remind you of something Jesus said to this church in verse three, because I want to go back and just talk about this for a moment. Verse three says, he says, [3]"*remember then what you've received and heard. Keep it and repent if you will not wake up*."

What did He say? I'll come like a thief (1Thessalonians 5:2) and you won't know when I'm going to arrive, because a thief never announces his coming unless he's a really dumb thief.

Right, but Jesus said that His coming we're told in the scripture that His coming would be like a thief. But only for some people. Notice what Jesus says to this church that has become dead, that has begun to compromise areas of purity. He says, if you don't wake up, I'm going to come like a thief and you're not going to know when I'm coming.

So, Jesus is coming. Are we going to know when he's coming? The answer to that question is yes. If we stay awake, we're going to know when he's coming, not the day or the hour. And we can't, nobody's going to start setting dates. We're told in the Scripture; *"no man knows the day or the hour*." (Mathew 24:36) But that doesn't mean we're not going to be prepared, that we're not going to know because he told us, "I'm coming."

So you see, the day or the hour doesn't matter. We know he's coming, right? We don't have to know the day or the hour. We just know He's coming. Is Jesus coming? Yeah, He's coming. When is He coming? Anytime. Anytime. Remember what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians? They obviously had questions about this. Let me put this on the screen.

It's in two parts. He says:

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-8 (ESV)

"Now, concerning the times, And the seasons. Brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief. In the night while people are saying "there's peace and security," then sudden destruction will come on them."

Notice that I want you to notice. He doesn't say "us". He says, sudden destruction will come on them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman and "they" not "us." They will escape. Now, let's talk about **us**. We go into the next

passage or the next part of this passage. He says, [4] *"but you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief."*

For you are all children of light. Children of the day. We're not out of the night or of the darkness. [6] *"So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.* [7] *For those who sleep. Sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night.* [8] *But since we belong to the day, Let us be sober, and that means sober minded, having put on the breast plate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation."*

So, is the coming of Jesus going to surprise those who are awake? No. Huh? Because he told us He was coming and when He comes, we're going to go. Hey, here He is. Just like He said.

Right now, I want to remind you, that as we're looking at each of these seven churches and the letters to these seven churches, we're looking at these not only as letters to the churches in the day in which they were given and for the situations that they were dealing with right where they lived, but we're also looking at these letters through the lens of what we've been calling the historic prophetic view.

And you'll remember that is a belief or a way of translating these letters in such a way as to say that each letter is a prophetic snapshot of a successive time in church history. And let me put these up again for you. You can see that we've highlighted the Church of Sardis, the one we're dealing with tonight. This is the one that essentially goes from about AD 1517 to around 1730, and we refer to this time period as the "Reformed church."

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The Historical-Prophetic View of the 7 Churches

Ephesus - Apostolic church (AD 30 – 100)
Smyrna - Persecuted church (AD 100 -313)
Pergamum – State church (AD 313 – 590)
Thyatira - Papal church (AD 590 – 1517)
Sardis - Reformed church (AD 1517 – 1730)
Philadelphia – Missionary church (AD 1730 – 1900)
Laodicea - Apostate church (AD 1900 -)

Okay. And that's why we've highlighted it that way for you. In other words, this is that period of time where the Reformation took hold and really began to change the landscape of Christianity. And some of you might be kind of

wondering. Well then if this is the period of the reformation, I always thought that was a good period.

I mean, good grief. They brought the dark ages to an end. The Middle Ages, that, were so full of, just darkness. When Roman Catholicism had gotten involved in terrible paganism and superstition and all the things that they were doing, and the Reformation really thrusted the church out of that age.

So, you might be wondering why is it that the Church of Sardis gives us a picture of this particular time period? Well, it might be good to get a refresher here a little bit on that period of time that we call the Reformation. And you know that it centers around a man by the name of Martin Luther who was a Roman Catholic priest. But he was a man who had determined in his heart to meet God.`

He wanted to find God. The problem was he was trying to find God through all of the typical Roman Catholic ways, and none of them were getting the job done for him. So, he started reading his. And that was really kind of a last ditch effort actually. And he learned through the pages of Scripture that forgiveness of sins and what it meant to be born again, had nothing to do with the things that the Roman Catholic Church was touting.

In other words, he realized, from the pages of Scripture, that salvation really had nothing to do with partaking of the Eucharist. It had nothing to do with confessing one's sins to a priest. It had nothing to do with paying for indulgences or working off one's sins in purgatory or any of the other things that the Roman Catholic Church was teaching.

And he came to accept the simple reality that salvation was a free gift. Offered through the death of Jesus Christ, made possible by faith in that death for each person who accepted it. And eventually he began to look at the Roman Catholic Church and all the things that they were teaching. And he wrote down what he called a thesis where he listed 95 things that were wrong with the Roman Catholicism and that he believed were unbiblical about the way they were operating.

And you'll know, I'm sure the history, he nailed them at in the year 1517 on the door of the. Cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany where he publicly and officially took a position against Roman Catholicism. Well, that was the event that became the catalyst for what we called the Reformation movement.

And, for the most part, it was a good thing. It spawned a lot of good things. The Word of God started to get back into the hands of the average man. Up to that point, Roman Catholicism taught people. That if you needed to hear anything from the Bible, you would hear it from your priest.

You didn't need to have a copy. In fact, it in some places it was outlawed to have a copy of the Bible if you were not a priest. And they told the people if you need to know anything, you'll hear it from me. And so the people were largely ignorant of the Scriptures. Well, with the dawn of the era of the Reformation, the word of God began to get into the hands of the common man.

And that was a huge thing for believers in Jesus. But while the Reformation was considered in many ways a good thing, it also stands as an effort that didn't quite go far enough. Because in its return, it didn't come all the way back to biblical Christianity.

Luther held fast to some of the things that Roman Catholicism taught, and he slightly modified others. And some of you who have a Lutheran background, you may be aware of some of those slight modifications. They came away from Roman Catholicism, but they didn't come all the way to biblical Christianity. Here's what's interesting. The name Sardis for that city means literally, “those escaping.”

And it is an apt name for those in the Reformation period who escaped or were escaping from the errors of Roman Catholicism. What we're going to see, however, is that the Reformation movement, even though it didn't come all the way back to biblical Christianity, it became a huge push toward the next time period. And what took place in that one.

And now we move on to that next church. Verse 7, in your Bible, [7]“*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, right, the words of the Holy One, the True One. Who has the key of David who opens, and no one will shut. Who shuts. And no one opens.”*

All right. Some wonderful words to the Church of Philadelphia.

Let me start by showing you where this is located. In Asia minor or modern day Turkey.

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You can see where Philadelphia was located. Also, that it means brotherly love because we have a city right here in our own country that has the very same name. It was named after its founder. A man by the name of Atlas the second, but who was nicknamed Philadelphos.

And the church in Philadelphia, as we put back up our historic prophetic view of the churches.

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You'll notice that Philadelphia, which was that time period from around A.D. 1730 to right around 1900, and I'm going to share with you how some believe that doesn't end at 1900 in just a bit. But this is that time period referred to as the "missionary church."

And we're going to talk about that in just a little bit. And we're going to talk about how the period of the Reformation that came before it, opened up the doors for the missionary period. But I want you to notice first how Jesus introduces himself to the church in Philadelphia. He says, [7] *"the words of the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one will open."*

Notice that Jesus emphasizes in this introduction, His right and His power to open doors that no one can shut and to close doors that no one can open. And he says to this church in verse eight, [8]"*I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have, but little. And yet you have kept my word and have not denied my Name*."

Those are some really pretty beautiful things to hear from the Lord. Even though he says that the church in Philadelphia was not the strongest church. He says, I know that you don't have, but just a little power. I want you to know something. Here's a promise to you. I have opened a door for you that nobody is going to be able to shut.

And the "open door," speaks of an evangelistic opportunity, and we know this because this term is used elsewhere in the scripture. The Apostle Paul used it in his letter to the Corinthians. Lemme show you this on the screen.

First Corinthians chapter 16, he wrote, "*for a wide door. (*In other words, an open door) *for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries."*

So, Paul uses this reference. This open door has been given to me. Paul was aware that God was the one who opened the door for evangelism, and he was bound and determined to go through it. Now, the reason this promise of an open door is so fitting to the connection that we have in the historic prophetic view of the Church of Philadelphia as the missionary church is because this is that time period when the church enjoyed just this unprecedented freedom of movement to go to the uttermost parts of the world and share the gospel.

Now, the Reformation Church, brought some really important changes into works, but it served mostly to prime the pump for what the missionary church

was able to do beginning in this time period. Because as I said, the Reformation Church put Bibles back into the hand of the common man. The church was no longer determining that for people and people were receiving and there were people printing Bibles now like Wycliffe and others who printed bibles and put them into the hands of the common people.

And this was all going on during this time period. Incredible evangelists that we still know of today. Names that we're still very familiar with during this time period. People like John and Charles Wesley. People like George Whitfield, David Livingston, Hudson Taylor, Jonathan Edwards, George Mueller, William Carey, and those are just the big names.

There was this vast number of people who probably aren't going to have their names, perhaps remembered in the annals of human history, but God knows who they are and because he opened this door during this time period, and people went out. And it spread like wildfire. This was, if you actually even just Google this, if you get on your computer and Google the missionary time period of the history of the church, you'll see these names.

You'll hear about how the Gospel went out during this time period. And there are many Bible students who believe that the missionary period of the church did not end in 1900, but is continuing to this day, and will continue until the Lord returns for His church. Even though we've seen it sputter, we have seen revivals since even 1900.

In fact, right around 1900, there was a huge revival, the Asuza Street revival. And then we had the Jesus movement in the 1960s and early seventies, which we're going to be watching a movie about. And that was a genuine revival that swept the nation. Now we're even hearing things about a little college in Kentucky that might be showing us the signs, the early signs of revival.

We'll just have to wait and see if it spread. And I pray that it does whatever's going on, there's something special going on at that college. And whether it turns into a full-blown revival again, that's yet to be seen, but there is something genuine that's going on there. And for that we rejoice.

But once again, there are a lot of people who believe that these last two churches, the missionary church and the Laodicean Church, we're going to cover in just a moment, go parallel to one another until the end until the end of the age when Jesus returns. And that may very well be true. It, it may very well be true.

Verse nine, notice what the Lord begins to say to them. In the way of promises. He says, [9] *"Behold I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not. But lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you."*

Isn't that an interesting sort of a promise?

These people who have come against you, they're one day going to confess that it was you that I was working through. And secondly, in verse 10, he says, [10] *"Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth."*

Now, I want you to stop here because this is a very interesting promise. God says here, in this promise, you have - past tense, kept my word to patiently. He isn't saying you will patiently endure. He says, you have - past tense patiently endured. Therefore, here comes the promise. I will keep you from the hour of trial, which most certainly refers to the great tribulation because he'll notice that he describes it as the hour of trial that is coming, "on the whole world."

And that is a description of this trial that connects it to the Great tribulation. And so he says to the missionary church, and by the way, this is one of the reasons why some people believe that the Missionary church runs alongside the Apostate Church of Laodicea toward the end of the age and up to the end of the age because of this promise right here that this church will still be on the earth when the coming of the Lord takes place. And yet the Lord will keep them from that hour of trial.

He says in verse 11, "*I am coming soon. Hold fast. What you have so that no one may seize your crown*." People, the crown is the reward we get for the works we've done in faith and in service to the Lord. So, the word that Jesus is giving to the missionary church is don't let anybody steal your reward by getting you distracted and keeping you from serving the Lord with a whole heart.

Don't let anybody steal your reward. It's yours. Here, the Bible tells us in Ephesians that he has provided good works for us to do in advance. They've already been provided. So all we have to do is walk in them. We have to just walk them out. But it doesn't mean that you're just naturally going to walk them out.

You can get distracted. And the things that the Lord has given you to do, you can decide not to do. But that would be having those things stolen from you,

those possible rewards. So he says, make sure that doesn't happen. Verse 12*,"The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it. And I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the. Of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name*."

Wow. There's going to be a lot of new names we're going to have at that time. [13]"*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*."

Wonderful promises. The final letter. Verse 14, *"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."* So, this is the letter to Laodicea once again. Let me put up the map for the final time so you can see where we've circled Laodicea on that map.

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Again, Laodicea was just as subject to earthquakes in that area as the other cities. And as we're hearing about today, it was in fact destroyed by an earthquake. But because it had a fair amount of wealth, the city was able to rebuild itself. Its main interest industry was like some of the other cities, cloth and particularly. woolen cloth.

We have no record of the Apostle Paul ever visiting the city of Laodicea, although in his letter to the Colossians, he mentions the Laodicean church two separate times. But you'll notice that Jesus introduced it, Himself, first of all. The Amen. Also, the "Faithful and true Witness," the beginning of God's creation.

I want to talk about each one of these, first of all, by calling himself the "Amen," Jesus is speaking of His sovereignty over human events, and the one who determines. Because the word amen means "so be it", or if you will, "it is done." So when you're saying that at the end of a prayer, you say, amen, you're saying, let it be done or it is done, by faith it is done, accomplished. Right?

So amen is a strong word, a determinative word. It's finished. It's done. Amen. And this is Jesus' way of preparing the Laodicean church for what they are about to hear. Notice He goes on to say He refers to Himself as the "Faithful and true Witness." In other words, he is saying, I am the personification of all that is true, right?

And I am faithful to the truth. So, what I'm going to tell you is true. Again, you know how I've talked to you many times about how if we took a test, we could do really good on it, but living it out is different. If I gave you a test piece of paper and the question was, "is everything Jesus said, true? Yes, or no?' I'm pretty sure all of you would check the "yes" box.

Here's the point. We don't live like everything He said was true. If we did, we would never worry. Ever. Because Jesus told us. He said, don't worry. He told parables and He said things like, look at the birds of the air. They don't worry.

So why are you worrying? Your Father knows what you need. He'll take care of you. But do we worry? Yes. Why do we worry? Because even though we know what He said, we don't always believe it. And yet Jesus reminds you and me, I am true. I'm a faithful witness. Faithful what I say, you what I tell you is faithful and you can trust me. It's always true all the time.

Something to remember. And then you'll notice that he calls Himself the "Beginning of God's creation." What does He mean by that? Do you know that some people have taken this particular phrase and they've decided that what Jesus was saying is He's the first of all of God's creation.

In other words, they believe that Jesus is a created being. He's just simply the first of all of God's creation. But do you know that the word that is translated "beginning," here in the Greek, does not mean first in sequential order? It

means first as in “source” or “originator of.” So what Jesus is saying here is essentially, I am the source of God's creation. I am the beginning. I am the one who, in other words, he's saying, I am the Creator. I am the source of creation.

Now, as we go on and look at this letter that Jesus dictates to the church at Laodicea, you'll notice that He gives them no commendation. There's no words of encouragement. There's no, “I see your faith. I see your hard work”. There's none of that. He just immediately goes in and says in verse 15, [15]“*I know your works: you are neither hot nor cold. 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.”*

Have you guys ever noticed how awful lukewarm water is? And if you really want to get grossed out, lukewarm pop. Now I say pop because I was born and raised in Minnesota - soda. Soda, pop, whatever. Isn't it terrible? Have you ever cracked open a warm one and taken a swig? It's like, yuck. I am one of those people that I have to have lots of ice in my cup. If I go through a drive through, I'll say, “fill it up with ice.” I don't even care if I don't get much to drink in there.

I want it cold. I want it ice cold. And I even do that in the winter. Sue thinks I'm crazy. She drinks coffee every morning and I'm drinking ice water every morning. Which is probably dumb, but it's what I do. And because, and I would never think to drink lukewarm water, it's just like, it's terrible. It's just awful.

Well, this word picture that Jesus is giving to the church at Laodicea would've been something they would've readily understood because they didn't have a local water source and they had to pipe their water in from Hierapolis, which was a few miles away. And by the time the water left the springs and went through the pipes and made its way to Laodicea it had become lukewarm.

It was neither hot nor cold. And so, He is speaking here of something they recognize, but He's using it to describe a spiritual condition. And the spiritual condition of lukewarmness, if that's a word, is really defined in how Jesus describes the church in the following verses. People say to me all the time, what does it mean to be lukewarm?

Well just read the passage. Look what He says. Look what he says in verse 17. [17]“*For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked*.”

There you go. If anybody asks you, or if you ever wondered, what does it mean to be spiritually lukewarm There's the description. We don't need to pontificate or make guesses about this. It's right there. And Jesus is making us aware that it is possible to be so deceived about our spiritual condition, that we actually see ourselves as one way, when in fact we are the exact opposite. Did you notice that? He says you see yourselves as rich, but you're not you're not, you are wretchedly poor.

But even though you see yourself this way. So my question is how do you see yourself? And here's the more important question, through which lens are you using to see yourself? That's the most important question. Jesus is telling these people that they are not realizing or truly seeing their true spiritual condition, and that is why he introduced himself to the beginning of this letter as the "Faithful and true Witness."

Guys, He is the Faithful and True Witness. I told you a minute ago, everything He tells you is absolutely true, and that even includes the things He tells you that you don't want to hear about yourself. He's always going to speak the truth to you. The question is, are you going to listen, and will you accept what He says?

He says to them regarding their condition in verse 18, [18]"*I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich."* Is He talking about literal gold that you mine out of the ground? No. He's talking about true spiritual riches because they thought they were spiritually rich when they were in fact poor.

And so He says, I counsel you to get real riches from me. From me. And He says also, [18] *"and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen*" because he told him, here you're naked. So, He says, I counsel you to get from me white garments. Well, we've already seen what white garments stand for, haven't we?

We've seen that that's a reference to purity and defiled or soiled garments is a picture of impurity. People who have given into sinful compromise, they've allowed compromise of sin to go on in their life without repenting. No repentance. They've just allowed it. They've tolerated it in their own. So he says, I counsel you to do these things.

And then the last thing he counsels them to do is, [18] *"to get from him, salve, to anoint your eyes so that you may see*. And this is probably one of the most important things that He's offering, because the Laodiceans were in desperate

need of the gift of seeing. They needed to see what was true, their true spiritual condition.

They did not, they could not see it. And so, He says, you need salve to put on, or to anoint your eyes, so that you might see. And you say, well, how's that? What? What are we talking about when we talk about salve to put on our eyes? Do you know what we're talking about? We're talking about the Word of God. But we're talking about your willingness to let the Word of God speak to you about your spiritual condition.

Do you guys know that the Word of God is for us a mirror that shows us what we look like? And it's not always pretty, is it? Have you ever just read your Bible and you kind of just went yuk because it just showed you what you look like? And it's hard, isn't it? It's hard to look in a mirror when you don't like what you see. And our natural tendency is to just walk away from the mirror. In which case we're talking about closing our Bible and just saying, I'm not going to go there.

Do you remember what James says about the word of God? Let me show you this on the screen from James chapter one. He says:

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James 1:23-24 (ESV)
"For if anyone is a hearer, of the word and not a doer. He's like a man who looks intently at his face, his natural face in a mirror for he looks at himself, but then he goes away and at once forgets what he looks like."

Because the Word of God shows us what we look like. But if we refuse to listen or to respond to it, we walk away and we're like a man who looked in a mirror at his face and then went, now what do I look like again?

The Word of God shows us. Once again, the question is, are you willing to accept what the Word of God says? That means, that's called being a doer of the word, because the word tells us what to do about our sinful condition. It tells us to repent, come back to the Lord, do the things we did at first, to have the heart that we need to have before the Lord. Are you willing to do that?

All right. Very important. Jesus says in verse 19, [19]"T*hose whom I love, I reprove and discipline*." Don't we read that very same thing in the book of Hebrews? God disciplines, those whom he loves, right? So, he says, [19]"*be zealous and repent.* [20]*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my*

voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with Me."

That's a wonderful promise. And that's a promise, not just for a backslidden believer. That's a promise for an unbeliever too. It's not like if an unbeliever knocks, He's not going to open the door. So that's a promise that's universal in that sense. And He says, not only, will I open the door, but I'll come into him and commune with him.

And he with Me. He says in verse 21, *[21] "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne*." There's a zany idea. But doesn't the Bible say that we will reign with Him? We will reign with Him. You think about that, you're just like, Lord, that's okay. I'll let other people reign with you, but I'll just kind of sit back and go, "okay you guys just have a good time".

Because I can't just really see myself really participating in anything along those lines because I'm not worthy. And you know what the Lord would say? Of course, you're not worthy. You never have been. And no one who reigns with me will be worthy in and of themselves. I'm the One who makes them worthy by My blood shed on the cross.

He is the one who makes us worthy. Our righteousness is through Him. He says, *[21] "they will sit on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. [22]He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Now, Laodicea is the final church in our prophetic snapshot that we'll put back on the screen for the last time.

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The Historical-Prophetic View of the 7 Churches

Ephesus - Apostolic church (AD 30 – 100)
Smyrna - Persecuted church (AD 100 -313)
Pergamum – State church (AD 313 – 590)
Thyatira - Papal church (AD 590 – 1517)
Sardis - Reformed church (AD 1517 – 1730)
Philadelphia – Missionary church (AD 1730 – 1900)
Laodicea - Apostate church (AD 1900 -)

You can see that I've highlighted Laodicea and essentially from AD 1900 to the present. And this is the Apostate Church. And the Bible predicts that in the last days, the church will largely become apostate. Now, that doesn't mean that everybody who lives in the last days is going to be apostate. And the reason we know that is because we know that when Jesus returns for His church, there's going to be people who go, how many we don't know. But there will be people on the earth who will rise to meet him in the clouds as Paul says, in first Thessalonians.

We know that God always, throughout all time, has a remnant of people, even though the characteristic of the age is largely apostate. Let me show you a couple of prophecies related to this, both given by the Apostle Paul. First from second Timothy. Paul writes to Timothy and to you and me saying:

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2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)
1 "*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self,* (have we seen that come to pass at all in our culture? They will be) *lovers of money, proud, arrogant, (, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable* (you can't even reach them)*, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,* (and look at this) *5 having the appearance of godliness, (*But there's going to be a complete and total denial of the power of God) *but denying its power.* (and Paul says we are to) *Avoid such people."*

This is a prophecy of the apostate church that has an appearance of godliness in the last days, and this will be a characteristic of the church in the last days, God still reaches out to these people and says, repent.

He still calls to them and says, turn before I spit you out of my mouth, because God doesn't want to spit anybody out of His mouth. So, He calls to them and says, repent. Turn. And then when Paul writes his second letter to the Thessalonians, he has this to say,

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2 Thessalonians 2:3 (ESV)
3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction"

Meaning, the day of the Lord will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and then I believe after that the man of lawlessness is going to be revealed, the son of destruction. I want you to look at that passage. Notice the word that is translated rebellion in the ESV, that is the Greek word, “apostasia,” and it is where we get our English word apostasy.

So Paul is saying, let no one deceive you. The day of the Lord will not come until the Apostasy takes place. Have we seen it in our day? Yes, we have. The Apostasy is here. You know the Apostate church is here. The remnant church is also here. But the Apostate church is looming large and larger all the time. I personally believe that the missionary church is also still here.

Now. That's my personal belief, but and you may differ, that's fine, but we're still seeing people come to Jesus. We're still seeing the outreach. We're still seeing revivals through this period of church history. And it's an exciting time to live, because I don't think it's going to be long before Jesus comes again and he comes first for His church to catch away the church, as Paul says in First (2 Thessalonians 2:3) Thessalonians, and then the man of lawlessness will be revealed once the church has been removed. So, we're going to continue on in Revelation chapter four. Next time, let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for giving us this time tonight to dig into the scripture. Lord, your word is so penetrating as the truth it contains. Lord, help us to be doers of the word. Help us Lord, to take to heart everything you've said to all the churches. Because just as these words apply to each of these seven churches, they apply also to various conditions of Christian life. And there's something here, Lord, for all of us, for every heart. Lord, help us to make the most of the time, for the time is short and the trumpet will soon sound. May we be found faithful. We ask this in Jesus precious name and all God's people said together. Amen. God bless you.