



Revelation 2020 - Lesson 3

Chapter 3:1-22

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- We continue to roll through the letters to the churches
 - We are examining the letters from a historical, universal and prophetic point of view
 - That is, we understand that these letters were written to a specific audience in a specific time
 - We also understand these letters speak to aspects of the church throughout its existence on earth
 - And finally, we see that the letters are prophetically revealing the nature of the church as it evolves and changes over time
 - Once we understand that the letters prophetically represent the arc of the Church Age, we see why they are the times that “are”
 - For as long as the Church is around to read these letters, the times are still in the period of “are”
 - The Church is the second point in Jesus’ outline
 - So only when the Church Age is over do we move past the times that “are” and into the things after that
- With that, let’s continue our march through the history of the Church moving now to Sardis

Rev. 3:1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Rev. 3:2 ‘Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

Rev. 3:3 ‘So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Rev. 3:4 ‘But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

Rev. 3:5 ‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Rev. 3:6 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- We continue to follow our structured approach to studying the letters, beginning as usual with the name
 - The meaning of the name Sardis is difficult to track down, but some scholars have proposed “those escaping” or “remnant”
 - It was a city of Asia Minor and capital of Lydia, 60 miles northeast of Smyrna
 - Sardis was an important commercial center
 - Among its claims to fame, the city was said to be the place where the process of dyeing wool was invented
 - It had massive temples and a very fertile soil that made it very productive

- Though today the city is in ruins in Turkey, in its time it was a strong fortified city
 - The ancient city was built on a mountain and was protected by a virtually impregnable watch tower and fortress and triple walls
 - Though many attackers tried to take the city, few succeeded
 - A legend associated with Sardis tells the story of how one army succeeded in capturing the city
- A local slave in the city noticed one of the guard soldiers on the city wall lose his helmet over the wall down the hillside
 - Thinking the helmet lost, the slave was surprised to see the same soldier appearing a short time later out of the hillside
 - The soldier climbed down to retrieve his helmet, climbed back up the mountain, disappeared into the rocks
 - He then reappeared a short time later back at his post on the citadel walls, helmet in hand
- Seeing this, the slave realized there must be a secret entrance into the city through the mountainside
 - So in 214 BC, when Antiochus the Great lay siege to the city, this slave was captured
- The slave offered to tell the invading forces of that secret entrance into the city in exchange for his safety
- With the help of the slave, Antiochus conquered the city through the secret entrance, like a thief in the night
- Turning to the letter, the description of Christ to this city was that Christ had the Seven Spirits of God and the seven stars (or angels)
 - The emphasis on the whole (i.e., 7) Spirit and the angels of the churches communicates the authenticity of the church
 - Sardis was a true church yet it also weak in one key way
 - He says He knows their deeds, but what Jesus knows, He says, is that Sardis doesn't have any deeds to speak of
 - They have a name, they are alive, but they are dead in terms of deeds
 - Sardis fell victim to the warnings found in James' letter, in which he says:

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

- We are saved by faith alone, but our faith without accompanying works is useless...to God
- But a faith by itself (that is without works) is dead and useless

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

- So Jesus tells this church they have the name of Christ, but they lack the deeds of

Christ, and as such they are dead

- Again, Jesus means it in the same way James does
- The faith of every believer is a gift of God intended to produce glory for God
- And the way we are supposed to fulfill that purpose, Scripture says, is through our works
- When we lack works, our faith is still there, but it's not fulfilling its purpose

Eph. 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- That's why Jesus says He has not found their deeds complete in His sight
- They have not as yet fulfilled Christ's purpose in their ministry
- More specifically, their work is incomplete in the sight of Jesus' God, which means the Father
- The Father alone judges whether our service to Him meets His expectations, and until we satisfy Him, we still have work to do
- This church became comfortable with faith alone, possessing salvation but without interest in spreading it to others
 - Sardis is an example of the church with creeds but no deeds
 - Churches can reach the point where doctrine and belief exists for its own sake
 - We begin to think that merely standing for the truth, believing the truth, and teaching the truth are enough for Jesus'
 - Those things are necessary to pleasing Christ, but they are not sufficient
 - The Christian walk is supposed to be as much practice as theory
 - Believers are supposed to care about truth and getting the Bible right
 - But if our faith remains an intellectual pursuit we are doing nothing for the glory of Christ
 - Our possession of the truth without action becomes cause for conviction rather than praise
 - The Sardis type of church is literally the opposite of the Thyatira style church
 - In Thyatira, the church had many great impressive works, which were growing and reaching more and more people
 - But their works were divorced from the truth of Scripture, so they lacked spiritual power
 - Physical works are supposed to lead to opportunities to share the truth of the Gospel, just as Jesus did in His ministry
 - Instead, Thyatira's works simply trapped people in a system of religion that polluted the soul with heresy and demonic teaching
 - Now we have a church holding to the truth of the faith yet failing to put that truth to work for the benefit of others
 - In Sardis the truth was disconnected from outward expressions of the love of

Jesus which limited the reach of the Gospel

- Thyatira was using works to justify heresy while Sardis was using truth to justify laziness
- Jesus commands this church to wake up, to strengthen what remains
 - To wake up out of a stupor of ignorance and apathy means to rediscover the mission of the church
 - Strengthening what remains suggests that some in the church still had a heart for the mission
 - So Jesus says take that remnant and build upon it, magnify it, or else it will eventually die out
- There is a fundamental truth about church life we can see at work all around us
 - Churches that serve themselves, that care only about what's said inside the building, eventually die
 - While churches that take the message outside the walls, that seek to share what they have with others, grow
 - And it's Jesus' desire that His Church be a body that goes out with the truth seeking to serve people
 - Without that desire, the future of that church will be in doubt
- Jesus then gives them the recipe to finding that strength...and it's simple: remember what you received and heard
 - As a church, Sardis was still young enough in that day to remember how their faith first arrived
 - Sardis was saved because someone (an apostle) came one day bearing a message
 - That arrival was a singular moment of joy for the city, for it marked the arrival of God's forgiveness and mercy
 - Surely, they remember that kindness and sacrifice of that apostle? They remember what it felt like to hear the good news for the first time?
 - The relief and joy...the release of guilt and burden...the expectation of a new, eternal future
 - If you can remember that moment in your own life, then you have all the reason you need to go out
 - So Jesus says if they remember what they heard and how they received it, they would find the desire to serve in the same way
 - If they fail to wake up, Jesus will enter their stronghold like a thief when they don't expect
 - A thief in the night does his work when we are asleep
 - And by the time we awake, it's too late...what we had is gone
 - So it would be for this church...they would find themselves in an empty house if they didn't wake up
 - The Spirit will take the mission somewhere else leaving behind only a shell: empty cathedrals, empty choir lofts, empty creeds

- Lastly, Jesus gives His usual encouragement to those in Sardis who were still working well despite the issues in the church
 - In v.4 Jesus says they are some who have not soiled their garments for they walk in white and are worthy
 - A white garment in the Bible is a picture of salvation, which we see clearly in v.5
 - Those who overcome (a term for salvation found in 1 John) are those who wear white (pure) garments
 - The white garment represents our spiritual cover provided by Christ's atoning work, as Paul says:

Gal. 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- And conversely, the unbeliever is described as someone lacking clothing altogether

2Cor. 5:2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,

2Cor. 5:3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.

2Cor. 5:4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

- Paul says we don't want to be naked but clothed with the dwelling from heaven (our eternal glorified body)
- So white garments represent the covering we receive from Christ, while unbelief is pictured by nakedness or the lack of spiritual cover
 - So what does Jesus mean that a few in the church of Sardis have not "soiled" their white garments?
 - In this context, an unsoiled white garment is a believer's good testimony
 - Remember, the person is already clothed, they already possess a garment which pictures salvation
 - So an unsoiled garment means they are worthy to walk with Jesus (that is, to be identified with Him), Jesus says in v.4
 - So the condition of the garment speaks to the condition of a Christians' witness (i.e., their outward appearance)
 - We get confirmation of this interpretation later in this book

Rev. 19:7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Rev. 19:8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

- Revelation 19 says a garment that is bright and clean represents the righteous acts of the saints
 - Simply said, we put on Christ by our faith alone, but how well we display Christ to the world depends on our acts of service to Him
 - This church only had a few unsoiled believers, so many had a bad testimony and were poor reflections of Christ
 - They were saved by faith, but that testimony was soiled by a life that didn't live up to what faith expected
- Yet Jesus ends reminding the church that no matter what penalty the Lord might visit upon that church, the individual believer was secure
 - Those who overcome will have white garments and Jesus will not erase their name from the book of life
 - And Jesus will confess them before His Father Who is in Heaven
- The phrase “I will not erase your name” often concerns and confuses believers
 - First, the book of life is the Bible's term for the Heavenly roll in which are recorded the names of every human being who is saved
 - Elsewhere in Revelation we're told that the Lord recorded those names in the book before the foundation of the earth
 - So the book's contents isn't determined by events on earth...the book and its contents were set before there was an earth
 - And Psalms 69 tells us that only the righteous are recorded in this book, meaning believers
 - But here we have Jesus talking about “erasing” and even the psalmist asks God to blot out the names of the wicked from the book
 - How do we understand these two comments? Can names come and go from the book?
 - The short answer is no, and to understand these two comments, we need to possess a better sense of Jewish writing
 - Poetically, it's a common technique in Jewish writing to emphasize a certain truth by negating its opposite
 - So in the psalm, the unrighteous are said to be blotted out of the book as a way of saying they will not be found in the book
 - The psalmist isn't literally saying that the names of unrighteous people were once in the book but then were taken away
 - The book couldn't be called the book of life if it contained the names of the unrighteous before the earth existed
 - The psalmist was simply negating the opposite as a way of speaking
 - Similarly, Jesus is emphasizing a believer will always be found in the book of life by saying He will not erase their name
 - Simply put, no believer can be erased from the book of life, and Jesus assures us of that truth here (I will NOT erase)
- So what is the prophetic interpretation of this church period?

- We know this church follows the Catholic period, and the name of the church confirms it as the Reformation Church
 - The name means escaping or perhaps remnant, like a group escaping out of apostasy and away from a heretical institution
 - The Spirit shifted away from one institution and to a new institution, reflected in Jesus saying He has the seven Spirits
 - The seven Spirits refers to the whole of the Spirit of God, so after 1517 AD the Spirit was no longer abiding in the Catholic Church
- And the Reformation truly reformed the Church
 - It brought a recommitment to Biblical truth and proper doctrines of the Church
 - The true Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was restored
 - And during this movement, most of the worst heresies of the Catholic Church were eliminated
 - Though some false practices remained purely out of tradition, like clergy-laity distinctions and infant baptism
- But one of the often-overlooked consequences of the Reformation was an abandonment of evangelism and a diminished emphasis on works of charity
 - Perhaps because Catholicism preached salvation by works using social works to spread their religion, the Reformers took an opposite approach
 - The Reformers emphasized God's sovereignty and biblical doctrines at the expense of seeking the lost and personal works
 - In fact, Martin Luther was so put off by talk of good works that he doubted the inspired credentials of the letter of James
 - James said faith without works was dead, which Catholics used to defend their false theology
 - So in his Bible translation, Luther moved the book of James out of the New Testament canon and relegated it to an appendix
 - So out of the Reformation came a culture that was alive in name only, having reflexively turned away from Catholicism's good works
 - And when a church stops preaching the importance of serving Christ in good works, we produce lazy Christians
 - We produce believers with a soiled testimony who have not completed their works in the Father's eyes
- So did the judgment Jesus threatened come to pass upon this church? Did they wake up or did the thief come?
 - For the first 100 years, the Reformation was dominated by a handful of state churches (Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian)
 - But in 1648, the Thirty Years war between Protestants and Catholics ended with the Peace of Westphalia
 - This treaty established the basis for modern Europe

- Among its many tenets, the Peace established that Christians were permitted to worship when and where they please
 - It protected Christian expression in greater forms and the Reformation Church lost control of its own creeds
 - As a result, new Protestant faiths began to emerge
- Finally the works of faith were re-ignited in a new generation as the Reformation church gave birth to a worldwide awakening of faith
 - Where the Church awoke, a new vibrant period of works began
 - And where the Reformation Church remained asleep, the thief came and took the Spirit elsewhere
- So the Peace of Westphalia gives us a date to mark the end of this period: 1517-1648
- Now on to Philadelphia...

Rev. 3:7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

Rev. 3:8 ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Rev. 3:9 ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie — I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

Rev. 3:10 ‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Rev. 3:11 ‘I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Rev. 3:12 ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Rev. 3:13 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- The name of the church means brotherly love, and it was founded by the king of Pergamum: Attalus II, Philadelphus of Pergamum
 - He was given the title Philadelphus because of his love for his brother Eumenes, who was the previous king of Pergamum
 - Today Philadelphia is known as Alasehir in Turkey
 - It was a small but prosperous commercial center in the early church
 - The main disadvantage of living in Philadelphia were the earthquakes which frequently damaged the city
 - In 17 AD, a strong quake rocked the city, and many were too scared to return

for fear of being crushed by the falling columns

- A large number of citizens decided to remain in the surrounding countryside, and this pattern happened off and on
 - That pattern held back the growth of the city but at the same time, it created a culture of persistence and determination
- Looking at the letter, Jesus describes Himself as the One Who is holy and true
 - Jesus sanctifies His Church and He is the embodiment of the message, and He is the one with the key of David
 - These references remind the church of the centrality of Jesus to the mission and message of the Church
 - And when we carry Jesus before us in our work, He can open any door
 - The key of David refers to David's role of working in the gate of the temple court in the Kingdom
 - The book of Ezekiel says that in the Kingdom David will preside over the court of the Temple and he has the key to the temple
 - In that day the temple court will be open to believers from the first day and remains there throughout the time of the Kingdom
 - So to say Jesus has the key of David tells us Jesus has the authority to grant access to the mercy seat in the temple
 - The mercy seat in the Holy of Holies in the Temple is the place of forgiveness
 - It's the place where the atoning blood of Jesus is applied to cover our sin
 - So it becomes a picture of salvation itself, which means Jesus has the key to forgiveness
 - And when Jesus opens that door, nothing can shut it and until He shuts it, it remains open
- As with everything else we've seen in the letters, Jesus shows Himself to be in complete control of where the Gospel is going and where it will be received
 - Jesus determines the time and place where the message of the Gospel will be received and the enemy can't stop it from happening
 - To say the door has been opened is a tremendous encouragement to any church with a heart to reach the lost
 - Knowing Jesus is in the business of saving souls, not us, means we can go out boldly without concern over success or failure
 - Because we know the result is entirely in Jesus' hands
 - But conversely, Jesus also closes doors at times
 - Which means there will be moments, circumstances, individuals, even seasons when our efforts don't produce
 - And this too is a decision of the One with the key of David to hold back opportunity for a time
 - Knowing that Jesus opens *and* closes is critically important to staying motivated in our mission of witnessing

- We can go out in the first place because we know Jesus is saving people, opening doors before us, so what's to lose?
- Because when our efforts go nowhere, we can't be tempted to blame ourselves or give up either
- Instead, we just acknowledge His sovereignty, recognizing He opens and closes, so we dust off our sandals and move on
- Historically, the church in Philadelphia was a small church, in keeping with the stunted city growth, but it was a strong, faithful little church
 - Perhaps the threat of death and the uncertainty of disaster created a good environment to teach about the Rock of Jesus
 - And of course, it would have opened opportunities to minister to people in need, which established relationships for the Gospel
 - In that way, the church in this city becomes the model church when it comes to evangelism
 - They worked in ways that Sardis did not, serving the people and always sharing the news of Jesus
 - But equally important, Philadelphia was careful to take note where Jesus wasn't working
 - Jesus says in v.8 they have a little power, emphasizing they recognized that apart from Jesus they could do nothing
 - This wasn't a church trying to work in their own power...they abided in Him operating with humility
 - As a result of their faithfulness to Jesus and to the mission of the church, they are one of only two churches that receive no condemnation
 - Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia was a church that pleased Jesus
 - Smyrna remained faithful to death in the face of persecution while Philadelphia remained true to the mission of witnessing
 - Jesus sure seems concerned about how well believers turn our lives into a witness to His name, doesn't He?
- Interestingly, these two churches also shared another thing in common: they both were persecuted
 - Both were attacked by the synagogue of Satan, which suggests a movement of Jewish persecution against the church
 - It's no coincidence that the two churches in this list with the strongest witness were also the two persecuted
 - When you stand out for the Gospel and for Jesus, you will be attacked
 - And when you are persecuted, it refines us, purifies us, tests and approves us, and as a result you will be equipped to please Jesus
 - That's why Jesus says rejoice when you're persecuted because your reward in Heaven is great
 - Notice in v.9 Jesus promises that though they are being attacked, He will defend them, but notice how that defense will take place

- But if I asked you in advance how Jesus might defend from persecution, you probably imagine Raiders of the Lost Ark
 - The Spirit of God comes forth in power to vanquish the bad guys by melting their faces right off
- But the Lord's ways are not Hollywood's ways
 - The Lord doesn't vanquish the Church's enemies, He converts them
 - In v.9 He says those persecuting the Church will come and bow down before them and know Jesus loved them
 - Jesus will give the Philadelphia church the power to convert their Jewish oppressors as He did with Saul
- And the result will be that those who once persecuted Christians for what they professed will come to understand that God loved them
 - And then they too will receive that message themselves
 - The point is when the church has a heart to reach out, they will see fruit in every situation even in the face of persecution
 - Persecution still comes and all the more as we obey Jesus, but He will turn it to good in time
- As a result of their faithfulness, the Lord promises to preserve the church in this city from an hour of testing
 - We believe this refers to the city being spared the persecution that came to the other cities of Asia Minor in the reign of Domitian
 - But also notice Jesus speaks of this hour impacting all who dwell on the earth in v.10
 - That is one of the clearest references we have in all the letters to alert us to the prophetic nature of each one
 - Because there was no worldwide testing of all humanity in the day of Philadelphia, we must assume this is speaking of things in the future
 - That comment was an important clue to show us that these letters contained a hidden prophetic interpretation
 - And the Bible does describe a coming worldwide testing of all humanity and we will study that period after we finish the letters
- Jesus ends His letter with a promise that He comes quickly, and they should hold fast to their gains so that no one may take their crown
 - He's reminding them that they are rewarded at the end of the race, when they come before Jesus, so don't stop running until the end
 - Paul says we receive the prize at the end of the race
 - And John reminds us not to lose what we gain while we wait

2John 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

- So we know Jesus is encouraging the believers in Philadelphia to keep it up so they

might be fully rewarded

- Finally, the inevitable encouragement to the believer that their eternal future is unshakable
 - They will enter the temple of God (in the Kingdom) and never go out any more
 - Unlike Philadelphia where citizens were too afraid to re-enter buildings, the believer will enter a city that cannot be shaken
- So what period of church history does this letter represent? First, we know it begins after the church of Reformation; the church absent works
 - For about 100 years after the Reformation, there was virtually no missionary work within the church
 - At that time, each European nation adopted a certain Protestant (or Catholic) denomination as the state religion
 - In those countries no other Christian groups were permitted, and any that tried to form were severely persecuted
 - Everyone born in a given country was automatically baptized and considered a Christian of that denomination
 - All Germans were Lutheran, English were Anglican, Scottish were Presbyterians, etc.
 - And any attempt to establish an alternative Christian group in those nations was severely persecuted
 - So when everyone is “born” a Christian, why evangelize?
 - But in 1648 Jesus set His Church free with the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the 30 Year War between Protestants and Catholics
 - In the decades after the Peace, the church experienced a remarkable rebirth – a worldwide missionary movement
 - Countless small, splinter groups of churches formed throughout Europe breaking away from established state denominations
 - Soon these new Spirit-led churches (as well as copy-cat false churches) experienced severe persecution
 - What Catholics did in persecuting Reformers, now the Reformers began doing to these newly formed Christian groups
 - What the Reformed Churches did in displacing Catholicism, so the Missionary Church movement did to the Reformed churches
- Soon Pilgrims, Anabaptists and others fled persecution and headed to the New World
 - Men like Jonathan Edwards began the Great Awakening on the North American continent
 - Other missionaries reached Central and South America, Australia, and Asia
 - In the span of about 300 years the church spread faster than at any time since the first century
 - Interestingly, the first Jewish evangelistic movements were initiated, in keeping with Jesus’ promise that the Jews would bow down
 - Obviously, Jesus opened a door for these evangelists

- And though they were weak (not being the established state church) nevertheless they succeeded stupendously
- For a time Philadelphia re-established the true, outward witnessing church Jesus intended for the world
 - And it had a great impact by holding to what was holy and true
 - And as a blessing, the Lord says He will spare it from the hour of testing coming to the entire world
- In prophetic terms this means it would not be the final church of the Age...there must be one more church to end the age
 - And the hard question is, when do we see this church starting?
 - When does the church of Philadelphia end?
 - To understand that, we need to go to our final letter

Rev. 3:14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

Rev. 3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

Rev. 3:16 ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Rev. 3:17 ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Rev. 3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Rev. 3:19 ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

Rev. 3:20 ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Rev. 3:21 ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Rev. 3:22 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

- The name Laodicea means “people ruling” or “judgment of the people”
 - The church was a prosperous commercial and administrative center in the Roman Empire
 - It was the richest city in its district, and when the city was destroyed in 60 AD, it refused to accept Imperial aid
 - Refusing such aid was unheard of since the cost to rebuild was usually beyond the reach of a city’s own resources
 - But Laodicea was so wealthy, it could fund the work itself

- The desire to do so was a reflection of their desire to remain independent of Roman authority and its self-sufficiency
- Among its many industries, three stand out historically
 - Laodicea was known for banks, linen and woolen industry and a medical school
 - The banks held the money of the district and profited greatly from the income
 - The woolen industry produced some of the finest wool cloth, and it was particularly known for a rare black wool
 - The medical school also contributed to the commerce of the city, selling a well-renowned eye salve for various eye diseases
- Looking at the letter, the description of Christ takes the phrase “faithful and true Witness” from John’s first chapter
 - Jesus also describes Himself as the Beginning of creation, which is a reference to the Alpha and Omega in Chapter 1
 - Why this reference?
 - As we’ll see in a minute, a testimony of Jesus’ truth and of Creation are both an essential to understanding this church
 - Jesus’ comments to the church again begins looking at their works
 - He says He knows their deeds, that they are neither hot nor cold
 - In earlier letters Jesus was concerned with the number or quality of their deeds because of how those deeds reflected on Jesus
 - But notice this time Jesus’ concerns are for how the deeds reflect upon the people themselves
 - Notice Jesus says in v.15 that “you” are neither hot or cold, though He wishes they were either hot or cold
 - Instead, they sit between these two conditions in a lukewarm state
 - And as a result, Jesus says He will spit them out of His mouth
 - The more literal way to translate Jesus’ words would be to say I will “vomit” you out, so it’s not a gentle word
 - Jesus’ choice of words puzzles us a little...what does it mean to be hot and cold in this context?
 - And making it harder, Jesus says He prefers either hot or cold to their current condition of lukewarm
 - We don’t see a solution in the immediate verse, so we keep moving to get more context
- Then in v.17 we get the context we need to understand Jesus’ concern
 - Jesus admonishes them for seeing themselves as rich and in need of nothing, which was a false view of their situation
 - In reality, the church in Laodicea was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked
 - Immediately we realize we must take Jesus’ words to be hyperbole or

metaphor, not literal

- First, we know the church in Laodicea was actually quite prosperous, not poor
 - And we know the believers living in Laodicea were not universally blind, and they did not walk around naked at all times
 - Much less did the church think it was clothed while actually naked, etc.
- Therefore, we must understand that Jesus was not speaking about their church's literal, physical condition
 - Instead, Jesus is speaking of their spiritual condition
 - Spiritually speaking, Jesus says the church was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked
- What do these terms mean when used to refer to spiritual conditions?
 - A quick study of the other passages in the Bible gives us only one conclusion
 - First, we remember what nakedness means, because we saw that earlier: lacking Christ's atoning covering
- And similarly to be poor or wretched or blind, all stand for the condition of a person before faith:
 - Blindness pictures the inability to see spiritual truth
 - Wretchedness refers to the unclean spiritual state of an unbeliever
 - And spiritual poverty refers to the failure to share in riches of Christ in the Kingdom
- So the church of Laodicea is condemned by Jesus for a state of unbelief, yet they tell themselves they have everything they need
 - They are wealthy and in need of nothing, and unlike Jesus, this church isn't speaking in purely spiritual terms
 - The church in Laodicea was very wealthy like the whole of that city, and as such it lived a very luxurious lifestyle
 - That was particularly out of keeping with other churches of the day
 - Yet their physical prosperity blinded them to their spiritual poverty
 - Even as they lived self-satisfied and secure in their earthly wealth, yet they remain in jeopardy of spiritual judgment
 - And at this point we ask how can a "Church" be unbelieving?
 - And the answer comes from a broader understanding of the church as a whole
 - From an earthly perspective there was an institution in the city of Laodicea called the church
 - People met in buildings, sang songs, prayed and conducted other services
 - And to anyone who observed these things, they would say "there is the church of Laodicea"
 - But from a spiritual perspective, that building full of people actually consisted of two different groups
 - There were believers in the room and unbelievers

- The true believer is the one who has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 8
- But the Spirit is invisible for we can't see who has the Spirit and who doesn't
- And outward signs are tricky...it's easy for someone to imitate what they see Christians doing and fool us into thinking they believe too
- So Jesus writes to this church talking about unbelief because apparently there was a large contingency of unbelievers congregating within
 - Such that Jesus' chief concern with the body as a whole was this rise of unbelief
 - The presence of unrecognized unbelief in the body is the single most dangerous problem any church can have
 - Christians are naturally wary of the influence of satanists or other non-Christians
- But we naturally lower our guard when someone says they are Christians like us
 - And yet if it turns out they aren't truly saved, we have now allowed a wolf in sheep's clothing into the church body
 - And that is a terrible situation for both sides
 - For the believers in the church, the influence of unbelievers in the body leads to apostasy and compromise
 - For the unbeliever, living side-by-side with believers leads to a false sense of security
- Now we see what Jesus meant when He said He would rather the church be hot or cold
 - Hot suggests a believer while cold suggests the opposite, an unbeliever
 - We understand why Jesus wants someone to be hot (believing) but why would he also prefer cold (unbelieving)
 - The key is to remember that Jesus says He prefers either of these two states to lukewarm
 - In other words, it's better to be cold (an acknowledged unbeliever) than to be lukewarm, thinking you're a believer when actually not
 - At least if someone is an acknowledged unbeliever they might be yet converted one day
 - But the lukewarm church goer doesn't even realize what they don't have
 - This is where you get those who declare to Jesus

Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Matt. 7:22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’

Matt. 7:23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.

- Or as Jesus says here, those who are in the church but do not belong to Jesus by faith will be spit out, or vomited out of His mouth
 - The city of Laodicea was situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, with two streams of mountain waters flowing into a valley at Laodicea
 - One stream of cold and refreshing water came from the southeast near a place called Denizil
 - A second source was a hot spring near Herapolis that produced an undrinkable sulfuric water used for medicinal baths
 - In Laodicea, the two streams combined, producing a foul tasting lukewarm water
 - Drinking that water would result in vomiting, since it was poisonous
 - When Jesus says that He would vomit them out of His mouth, they understood the meaning clearly
- Not surprisingly, there is no commendation to this church (the only church with nothing positive said), and in v.18 Jesus gives an exhortation to this church
 - Each recommendation is a spiritual remedy to cure the heart condition of the church
 - First, Jesus advises them to purchase (obtain) from Christ gold refined by fire so they might become rich
 - Gold refined by fire pictures our eternal treasure which Christ qualifies us to receive
 - Secondly, they should buy white garments to clothe themselves
 - Once again the garments refers to the robes worn by believers which picture Christ's atoning work
 - They are naked spiritually, meaning unbelieving, in contrast to the believer with insufficient works who had "soiled" robes
 - So this too is an allusion to placing faith in Jesus
 - Finally, they need eye salve to see, and seeing in spiritual terms means to come to a knowledge of God's truth
 - Each of these remedies draw from the major industries in the city
 - Jesus is emphasizing how this church relies on its worldly prosperity as its measure of worth
 - But it's using the wrong measure...it should have been looking to Heaven for its measure of success
- Jesus gives the church an exhortation, a challenge to change and repent
 - He says the ones who are truly the Lord's will know reproof, correction and discipline
 - Which is a way of saying that luxurious, easy, safe living isn't the standard for successful Christian living
 - Instead, the course that gives us the most reassurance is one of training and conviction

Heb. 12:6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,

AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

Heb. 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ...

Heb. 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- Following the exhortation, in v.20 Jesus calls this church to faith in Him
 - Those who hear His voice and open the door (of their heart) may receive Him and possess what they have been missing
 - And for those who do so, salvation awaits, pictured by dining at the table with Jesus in the Kingdom
- Finally, for those who were of faith, the overcomers, Jesus says I will extend the great privilege of ruling with me in the Kingdom
 - So that even in this church of unbelief, true belief still existed and would still endure
 - No matter how lost this church became, the true believer was always in Christ's care
- By now, it should be obvious that the seventh church will be the last period in the Church age, the times that “are”
 - And it should be equally obvious that this is the age we live in now, which I call the Apostate Church
 - Apostasy means to fall away, to abandon something that was previous accepted
 - But the sense here is not with respect to a certain individual coming to true faith and then leaving the faith
 - The Bible is clear that a person who is born again is forever a new creature in Christ and spiritual rebirth cannot be reversed
 - We're talking about the church overall changing from that of predominantly believing to predominantly unbelieving
 - So earlier the church was Philadelphia, a faithful, believing church
 - But now it has fallen away from the Lord and His word and is no longer a believing church
 - As an institution, it is apostate having left the truth
 - Paul taught that this falling away or apostasy within the church would mark the last days of the age

1Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

1Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

1Tim. 4:3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the

truth.

- It comes because of doctrines of demons (false teaching) promulgated by deceitful spirits indwelling liars is seared in their conscience
 - These are false teachers who are influenced by demons to say what they say and lead the church astray
 - This is exactly Jesus' concern for a lukewarm church: unbelievers masquerading as believers to introduce false teaching
- One of the signs of the end of the age and the apostasy is the trend to advocate abstaining from certain foods
 - The key issue here is the wealth of the church in the last days
 - Like Laodicea, the Apostate Church has so much wealth that people can afford to be picky eaters
 - And in that pickiness, the enemy takes advantage and begins to assign spiritual meaning to food, making it a false god
 - While we shrug our shoulders at this concern, wondering what's the big deal, that in itself tells us we are Laodicea
 - The luxury of being picky in our food selection is a modern phenomenon of wealthy cultures
 - Never before in history has such pickiness been possible for the church as a whole, but it is today
 - So this detail is meaningful for how it points us to our day and no other day in history
 - Paul gives us more detail about the apostate church in 2 Timothy

2Tim. 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

2Tim. 3:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

2Tim. 3:3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

2Tim. 3:4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

2Tim. 3:5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

- These traits have existed in the world to varying degrees from the time of Cain
 - But Paul says the last days will be known for these things
 - Simply put, they no longer become the exception, they become the rule
 - And looking through the list, it's hard to imagine a world dominated by these traits...or is it? This is our world!
- The last days, the time of the Apostate Church, will also (not coincidentally) be an age of excess and brutality and perversion

- And what brought these things to pass? Where did the church go so wrong?
- Paul alludes to the cause in 2 Timothy again

2Tim. 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2Tim. 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

2Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

2Tim. 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

- Myths and doctrines of demons brought about this falling away in the church, but what are these false teachings specifically?
 - The clue is found in the way Jesus addressed the Laodicean church in the beginning
 - Jesus said He was the beginning and end of Creation the True witness
 - Jesus is referring to two important, bedrock beliefs of His Church that were lost at the end of the last century
 - The transition from the Missionary church to the Apostate church began principally as a result of two movements
 - First, the end of the 19th century brought the arrival of Biblical criticism
 - This movement began in Germany with the teaching that Scripture was not inerrant
 - On the contrary, scholars argued that the Bible must be understood as an imperfect work of men
 - Therefore, it must be interpreted loosely and without regard for historical views, and in fact its literal meaning was not important
 - These schools taught men to question the authorship of books of the Bible, and other details long before accepted as truth
 - In the U.S., seminaries began to interpret Biblical doctrines in light of natural laws and human reason and scientific discovery
 - These new thoughts caused divisions and disagreements in the church
 - And at that point, compromises were made to doctrine because unity was considered more important than fighting for the truth
- Quickly, pulpits were filled with pastors trained at these “progressive” seminaries, leading to the disappearance of orthodox Biblical teaching
 - The trends continues today and has only worsened in the past decades
 - Now humanistic principles, self-help and pop psychology is preached in place of God’s word
 - Jesus refers to this trend in declaring Himself to Laodicea to be the faithful

and true Witness

- He is the truth and He witnesses to the Father
- Secondly, the rise of Evolution in the 20th century weakened confidence and reliance on scripture in many denominations and their congregations
 - As Peter promised in 2 Peter 3, people began to reject the biblical account of Creation
 - A worldwide belief in a fairytale called Evolution which directly contradicted Scripture gave fuel to doubt in the Bible
 - It was all the easier to claim that the Bible wasn't to be taken literally than to fight the world's belief in Darwin
 - And when the Bible can't be trusted for how it say things began, then it can't be trusted for how it says it will end
 - And without a beginning nor an end to worry about, life becomes only about the here and now
 - And God and His word becomes an afterthought
 - Because the Church left behind the True witness of God's word and the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of Creation, it left behind Jesus
 - And in leaving Jesus, the last days church becomes an apostate human institution void of true faith in many corners
 - Interestingly, the name Laodicea means people ruling, and it's a reference to our time in two ways
 - First, it's a reference to democracy, the dominate form of government in the last days – a clear marker of our times
 - And secondly, it refers to the hearts of people ruling themselves rather than being ruled by Christ, another clear marker
 - The Apostate Church runs from the beginning of the 20th century and is still ongoing...but for how much longer?