

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock"

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[0 : 0 0] So the Bible passage this evening is in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 7 to 22. It's on page 1235 of your Bibles.

I'll give you a wee moment to find it. So Revelation, chapter 3, starting at verse 7.

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia writes, These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars. I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

[1 : 0 3] Since you have kept my commands to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God.

And I will also write on them my new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write, These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

[2 : 1 2] You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see.

Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen. Thanks a lot, Joe, for reading. If we've not met, a really warm welcome.

[3 : 24] As Simon said, it's great to see you, especially if you're here for our Tri-Church service, our once a month, especially guest-friendly time together. But we hope you'll always feel welcome if you're exploring the Christian faith.

And our custom as a church is just to open the Bible and look at it section by section, chapter by chapter. So we let God set the agenda. And it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bible open at Revelation chapter 3, which is page 1, 2, 3, 5 in the church Bibles there that Joe was just reading from for us.

And if you'd find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet as we look at that together. So let's ask for God's help and let's pray. Jesus says at the end of that letter, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for your revealed will, your life-giving word, and we ask that you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, just imagine with me for a moment that you are extremely poor, destitute. You don't have the money to buy food, to buy shelter.

[4 : 40] There's no welfare state provision for you. And someone extremely wealthy offers that they will give you gold, not just any gold.

They'll refine gold in a fire so that it's pure, 24-carat gold, and give it to you so that you never have to think about money again. You'll be able to be generous because you'll have more than you need.

Or imagine that you are blind. I think most of us here tonight who I've met can see clearly. Just imagine you're unable to see. And you have that limiting your experience of life.

And you hear of a miracle eye doctor. Everyone's talking about them. Because they have a special eye treatment that will work for your eyes. And they've offered, if you come to me, I'll treat you for free.

And you'll be able to see clearly and perfectly. Take it in both cases of that need being met, your life would be completely changed. And those vivid images are both in Jesus' words tonight that he addresses to a church, a community of his people.

[5 : 53] They describe their spiritual condition because they have kind of moved on from him. And really they describe the spiritual condition of anyone who is not trusting in Jesus.

They're either not yet trusting him or they've moved on from him. We're looking tonight at the last two in this series of seven letters written by Jesus to his churches in first century Turkey.

What's now modern day Turkey. But that area which was called Asia at the time, confusingly, in the first century. And we've been looking at these seven letters that he wrote.

He's not there anymore physically. He's spiritually there. But this is after Jesus had died and risen again and ascended into heaven. So he sends an angel to the apostle John, who had known Jesus personally, to give him this revelation to pass on these letters to these real churches.

And as he describes their spiritual condition and our spiritual condition, if we're not trusting Jesus, we might wonder, well, why would we trust him?

[7 : 05] Why would we trust that these letters and what they say about the human condition are true? But he calls on us to trust him in verse 14 at the start of his letter to the church in Laodicea.

If you look at what he calls himself, he says, these are the words of the Amen. Well, Amen is a Greek word that means truly. So these are the words of the true, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

So we take those titles one by one and take them as related. The reason that we can believe Jesus' claim that he is the faithful and true witness about himself, about God, about us, is because he is the one God raised from the dead, the firstborn over the new creation.

He is the king of all creation. And so we can trust what he is saying is true. The only man who's ever gone through death and out the other side, never to die again.

And from tonight's letters, we get three instructions. So they're on the sheets. The first is to that first church, the one in Philadelphia. So to the church that's hard pressed, he says, hold on to Jesus.

[8 : 18] We see how the church in Philadelphia feels halfway through verse 8. He says, I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

So this is a battle-weary church. And the persecution that they experienced at that time, in the 70s, 80s AD, had come from the Jewish synagogue.

This is the second of the seven churches in these chapters. There are two where Jesus describes the synagogue in the city where they live as the synagogue of Satan.

The first century Jews were in a great privileged position. The bit of the Bible that we have that's actually most of our Bibles today, the Old Testament, that was written before Jesus came, they were the Jewish scriptures.

God's word mediated to his people through Moses and the prophets. And the Jewish people had those scriptures. And if you were going to summarize the Old Testament in two words, it would be Messiah promised.

[9 : 25] God is sending a rescuing king into the world. So Jesus arrives fulfilling the ancient shadows that are in those scriptures. And for sure, the early Christians tended to be Jewish people who had seen that Jesus was the Messiah who'd been promised.

But the established Jewish institution at that time rejected the claims that Jesus is the Messiah. So in a place like Philadelphia, the synagogue expelled followers of Jesus.

They were people who we would call them today messianic Jews, people who are Jewish by background, but have seen that Jesus is the one promised in their scriptures. They found themselves with the door slammed in their faces by the synagogues.

And they encouraged the civic authorities to make things hard for Christians as well, because they wanted to stamp out this movement that they saw as a sect. So when we see that kind of language in Revelation, it's kind of unhelpful to think of the Jewish community today, in somewhere like Glasgow, whom we long will see that Jesus is the Messiah promised by the scriptures.

But I think a better equivalent to think of today would be when church organizations actually persecute authentic Christians because they don't belong to their tribe.

[10 : 49] They don't kind of fit in and keep their rules, especially in a place where a kind of a Christian institution or organization is reasonably influential or powerful, and they feel threatened by an authentic Christian movement that doesn't belong to them.

I think of a friend who spent a number of years serving with student mission in Russia, with the equivalent of kind of UCCF in Scotland. He was in Russia working with IFEEs, helping students in Russia who are Christians to share Jesus with their friends on campus.

And he said to me that the biggest opposition they faced was from the Russian Orthodox Church, sadly, because they were deeply against the idea of ordinary Christians separate from the Orthodox Church opening the Bible with friends in language they could understand, vigorously opposed to it.

And so they would raise suspicion about the group with the world. Well, here in Philadelphia, the church found itself hard-pressed because of that kind of persecution.

They felt as though they had no energy left. They're weary. They're barely standing. And Jesus speaks words that are like a scattergun of comfort for them, overwhelming them with comfort.

[12 : 15] He says he is the only doorkeeper who counts. If you look at verse 7, he says these are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

Well, the key of David is the key to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the key that unlocks the door to heaven itself. And it must be a really huge, heavy door because nobody else can move it.

He says of himself, what he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. Isn't it such an amazing picture of the doorway to heaven?

And the good news for them is it comes next. He says, I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. So Jesus has pushed open this immense door for them, effortlessly for him, although at great cost to himself.

But he's pushed this door open. We might say to these guys, come on guys, the doorway to heaven is wide open for you. Just keep going. It's an open goal. It's on a plate for you.

[13 : 20] Why? Well, what he says about them is really simple, isn't it? He says they have kept to his word and they've not denied his name. That's the simplicity of walking in the path that leads to heaven.

So he gives them this list of quick fire promises of comfort. In verse nine, he says they'll be vindicated and everyone, even their oppressors will one day know that Jesus really loved them.

He says he'll protect them in verse 10 because he knows they're weary and weak. He assures them in verse 11, I'm coming soon. Think of his return as imminent. All they have to do in verse 11 is hold on to what you have.

And the synagogue might have thrown them out, which if they'd grown up as Jewish people, they'd have thought of the synagogue as kind of God's house, the place God calls home. The synagogue has thrown them out, but look at verse 12.

He says, the one who is victorious, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. And the thing about a pillar is you can't move it out, can you?

[14 : 27] Over on your left, over there, you can see a wooden list there of names. That's the ministers of St. Silas since 1864. Some of them were here many years.

My predecessor was here 19 years. But they've all gone now, except me, and one day I'll go. But the pillars, they're not going anywhere.

They've always been here, these pillars. And obviously, this is just a building. This is just a shelter that we gather in. When Christians gather as a church, the people are special. The building's not special.

It's just a building. But when Jesus talks about the temple here, he is talking about the future, permanent, home of God among his people. Later in Revelation, we'll hear him describe the whole of the new creation as the temple.

He says in verse 12, never again will they leave it. So the one who holds on to what they have from Jesus, that future place that's going to be full of the goodness of God and the joy of God's presence, they will be part of the furniture, Jesus says.

[15 : 36] So you can't always tell what Jesus thinks of a church by appearances. If we visited the church in Philadelphia, meeting in someone's home, we might have thought, goodness me, this is a struggle.

I'm not sure how much longer these guys are going to manage. This church looks like it's on life support. And yet here is Jesus with only good things to say about them. Why? Because they love him and they've not denied him.

They've kept to his word. If we visited the church in Laodicea that we're going to come to in a moment, we might have thought, now this is what I'm talking about. This is a church with huge potential.

It's highly skilled. The people are wealthy. They're competent. This is a strategic church. Jesus says that church needs a rescue operation. We'll see.

So Jesus' words, they comfort the afflicted and then he afflicts the comfortable. Always for good purposes to keep his people going. In our little Anglican network in Europe that we're part of, there's a church in South Wales in Pembrokeshire led by Josh Maynard and he led a small church family that took the decision they had to leave the church in Wales because the church in Wales has decisively moved away from trusting the Bible as its authority, particularly in the areas of God's design for sex and marriage.

[17 : 03] But they took the decision to leave, to stay faithful to God's word and it's been a complete nightmare for them. He has had to move home with his family several times. At one stage they had no fix to board.

They were homeless. But they found a building they could meet in. It was a school. They went and contacted the school, said, we're a church, can we meet in your building on a Sunday? And they thought, finally we've got a place we can meet as a church.

And then the local church in Wales church complained to the school and said, you can't let those guys meet there. So the school said, oh, sorry, we can't have you meeting in our school.

So then they found a community centre eventually where they could meet. And if you'd gone to visit the church at that time you would have thought this is not impressive.

So the children's ministry was in the car park because there isn't any other room for them to meet. So you drop off your kids in the car park for the Sunday school leaders and you go in in this church and I guess, I've not been, that the music is not amazing and people look a bit knackered because they've arrived in and they've set the place up and they know that as soon as the service is finished they've got to set the place down.

[18 : 20] But if they trust Jesus and they're holding on to him and they're not denying him, wouldn't Jesus say wonderful words of comfort to them? Things like, I've placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

Everyone will one day see that I have loved you. You will be a pillar in the temple of my God. So that's to the hard-pressed church. Secondly, we hear about this self-sufficient church, the church that's self-sufficient and basically, Jesus needs them to know you are broke without Jesus.

So look with me at verse 15. I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor hot, nor cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth.

Now Laodicea was a prosperous city. It was built on a trade route. It had a financial sector that it was proud of and known for, a banking sector. It also had a medical school with an eye hospital and it was famous for a textile industry based on a particular type of fleece wool that they had developed.

What it didn't have was good water. Ten miles east of Laodicea was Colossae, which had a good supply of cold, fresh drinking water.

[19 : 45] Six miles to the north was Hierapolis, which was famous for its hot springs. So to get water to Laodicea, the Romans built aqueducts.

By the time the water arrived, it was lukewarm and it was contaminated because of the kind of stone pipe work with this sort of lime scale that ruined the taste.

So imagine like living in London, but like miles worse even than living in London. You know, when you live in London, the tap water, you keep having to change your kettle because it gets like full of lime scale and you change your iron and people have that fact for you that whenever you drink a glass of water, they say, you know that's been drunk nine times before and you think, why am I living here?

Well, this was much worse than that, much worse. So when Jesus says, you are neither hot nor cold, I think there's a natural wisdom as we hear that and I've heard people understand that before.

You know, I understand people sometimes think, or maybe he's saying like hot is good and like keen and cold is like nowhere near keen, don't want anything to do with Jesus and they're kind of in the middle and he's saying, well I'd rather you were one or the other but I don't think he is saying that.

[20 : 58] Almost certainly, he's saying hot good, cold good, you not good. I once spent a summer working in a restaurant doing pot wash, I don't know if any of you have ever done pot wash in a restaurant, it's jolly hard work and where I worked there was this South African chef Dave, head chef Dave, he was a big man, he was a scary man and as well as like trying to frantically wash the pots, there was this thing where he used to occasionally ask for a cup of tea while he was working and there was one day I distinctly remember he asked for a cup of tea and I was like trying to make his tea and I like I set it to one side to brew and then I was like suddenly all these pots arrived, so I'm frantically doing that and about 15 minutes later he says, boy, where's my tea sort of thing, I don't know what he called me I can't remember but I was like I forgot his tea so I handed him this tea right, but it was like it'd been there a while and it had gone lukewarm and he took this big gulp of tea and he just sprayed it across the kitchen in disgust, spat it out of his mouth.

Well Jesus is saying to the Laodiceans, you are like your own water supply, I want to spit you out. It's disgusting. And the extraordinary thing about that comment from Jesus about this whole letter is that Jesus would say that not about a bunch of people out there in the world who don't want anything to do with him but about a group of people who claim to be his church.

How alarming that Jesus would say to a group of people willing to meet and say we're Christians, you repulse me. Such is your spiritual ill health.

I want to spit you out. And in verse 17 it's their smug self-sufficiency that he objects to. You say I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.

But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. The more they've achieved in life in this prosperous city, the less they feel they need Jesus.

[23 : 11] And in Glasgow's West End this must be a danger we have to be aware of in life. It's quite striking. This city was known for and proud of its banking and its medical school and its clothing.

And I was just thinking on Friday afternoon I went for a run and I ran from the office here down along the river. You've got the new Barclays buildings all on one side of the river and you've got Morgan Stanley and J.P. Morgan on the other side.

And then on my way home cycling past the medical school and then Gartnavel where two of the eye doctors at Gartnavel come here to St. Silas. And isn't it striking that the way that the Western world is comparable to that kind of success story that they would have enjoyed.

And the thing is that what it does is it leaves you accustomed in life to thinking you don't need help from anyone else. I think about the people in my neighbourhood they are not used to ever asking anyone for help.

So then the danger is we think that must be true spiritually as well. What is true materially in life what is true in the things I can see around me that must be true spiritually.

[24 : 21] And when we come to the words of the scriptures and God's word says to us the truth about our lostness without Jesus we find that implausible to hear that we are blind without him and we can't see God we think we can see the Bible says we are spiritually poor we are destitute without Jesus but we think well that can't be right because I must be rich because of my material things.

The Laodiceans had forgotten that they needed Jesus and when you forget you need him you stop loving him because you fail to appreciate what he has done for you and Jesus words against them are therefore shockingly strong.

we might think of a church today where people still go along they attend they wear their Sunday best they're happy to be on a rota but in their hearts they don't believe the gospel anymore the message that it's only by faith in Jesus that anyone can be made right with God you could visit churches today or chapels or religious assemblies in school that look like a church where people stand up to sing the hymns and they kneel down when there are prayers but where the gospel is not actually heard and believed Jesus is either not mentioned or when you hear him mentioned he's just a moral example to follow so there's no real spiritual life and it's good to reflect I think on how there's a rightness in us as ordinary people with finite knowledge being slow to judge another group of people but it's good to remember how strong Jesus language is here to the

Laodiceans when we see a church without the gospel a group of people without the gospel it's worth saying though it's not something you can judge by style you could find a church that's very formal and very traditional but where people's hearts are really on fire for Jesus and you can find churches that are very relaxed and informal with a great band and dazzling lights but where people don't feel a daily dependence on Jesus it's not a style thing and people sometimes say there are kind of four generations in the life of a church that lead to this kind of spiritual death in the first generation the gospel is preached in the second generation the gospel is assumed it's not preached anymore they just assume people believe it in the third generation the gospel the news about Jesus is quietly not believed and then in the fourth generation it's denied so for us

Laodicea hopefully is a cautionary tale a tale that reminds us that in life the more some of you become high achievers the more you become a success or you are a success the more you become someone people look up to because you've become a big cheese in the world's eyes the harder it can be to keep a spiritual fervor a kind of spiritual life of healthy dependence every day on Jesus remembering that without him you can't please God and with him you could lose everything else and he would be enough and if you don't feel you need Jesus anymore you stop loving him so what's the solution we've heard a message for a church that's hard pressed a message for a church that's self-sufficient thirdly to the church that's missed the point the same church in Laodicea invite Jesus in for dinner so Jesus' words have been severe but look at the reassurance he gives them in verse 19 he says those whom I love

[28 : 18] I rebuke and discipline that door that only Jesus can open or close into heaven he's not fully closed it on the Laodiceans otherwise he wouldn't bother speaking to them the very fact he's rebuking them and disciplining them is a mark of his love for them he longs to be their saviour again and if they'll turn to him afresh today and if we'll do that tonight if we feel we've drifted he will still provide everything that they need look at verse 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so that you can see so the gold is this brilliant picture of the way Jesus joins us with him in a union like a marriage where he is a majestic prince and when we come and trust him our spiritual poverty is taken away and we share in his riches the white clothes picture how without

Jesus one day we'll all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and on our own shameful nakedness but the moment we turn to Jesus he clothes us in what's just right white clothes perfectly pure without blemish because he's washed them in his own blood and the salve reminds us that without Jesus' help we can't see God it says elsewhere in the Bible that the God of this age the kind of the spiritual darkness of the devil has blinded the eyes of those who don't come to Jesus so we can't see God but if we just say to Jesus like the blind man in Mark chapter 10 Lord I want to see he will open our eyes and we'll see God as he really is in the face of Jesus Jesus stands ready to give these things to us for free when we go to him the barrier is our self-sufficiency our proud self-dependence so we get to this extraordinary verse 20 that's kind of a bit like the whole letter to the

Laodiceans it's both devastating and wonderful verse 20 Jesus says here I am I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with that person and they with me do you see how it's devastating to imagine isn't it that here is a church receiving a letter from Jesus and the picture is he's not here you've missed that he's outside and more than that he's banging on the door and no one's noticed it's absolutely shocking and then think about the invitation Jesus says even then to a church that has forgotten him here I am behold if anyone hears my voice and opens the door

I will come in and eat with him and he with me just on the screen we've got Holman Hunt's famous picture of the moment you see Jesus there it's a romanticized painting of Jesus obviously it's not saying that's what he looked like it's very it's highly symbolized but this painting I was given a copy of this picture when I was 11 years old and a lot of people have been encouraged over the years by this painting when I was in Lancashire before I moved to Glasgow eight years ago my bishop I had a good bishop and he Julian had been saved by this verse and this picture and he used to just tell everyone in every church he ever went I heard him say this everywhere he went that he became a Christian he got saved by Jesus through Revelation 320 and this picture now why was it so powerful for Julian Julian and this may ring true to some here tonight

Julian was a little bit like the kind of church here in Laodicea Julian grew up as a good boy he served in his kind of school chapel he was always at church because he had some kind of fear of God and he thought that kind of doing stuff at church was all wrapped up with being a good person to please God what he missed was that you actually have to ask Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour and then he was shown this picture and this verse and the penny dropped for him it's not about being good for God and you can see in the picture that Jesus is knocking on a door as the light of the world but there's no handle on the door remember at the start we looked at the letter to the church in Philadelphia and we heard Jesus is a real expert at opening and closing doors when he opens a door no one can close it when he closes the door no one can open it why doesn't he just open the door to this church he wants them to open it doesn't he the invitation goes out to everyone hear his voice invite

[33 : 40] Jesus in you open up the door and you invite him into your life to be your saviour and king and the promise from Jesus is for if you do that you will have a personal relationship with him living fellowship with him and we don't know whether the church in Laodicea did that after this letter but tonight for any of us who feels we've become self sufficient that maybe we've left Jesus on the outside we hear his voice and we have the opportunity to open the door to him let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word Lord

Jesus we praise you that you hold the key of David that what you open no one can close and what you close no one can open and heaven is in your hands you rebuke and discipline those whom you love we come to you tonight and we ask that where we are poor you will give us the pure gold of your spiritual blessings where we are shamefully naked because we relied on our own deeds to please God that you would give us your white clothes of righteousness to wear and where we are blind we have lost sight of who your father is you would give us spiritual sight to see his glory in your face we hear your voice tonight urging us that you stand at the door and knock and we ask afresh come into our lives and more and more into the life of our church to be our personal saviour and lord that we might enjoy living fellowship with you for our good and for your name sake we ask amen we're going to respond to god's word by singing so let's stand if you're able and katherine and the band will lead us