

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 7

Revelation 3

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's course on the book of Revelation. This is session 7, The Seven Churches of Revelation: Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

The Promises to the Letter of Sardis. We said Sardis had a reputation for being alive, yet actually, they were dead. One other thing to say about their reputation of being alive. Number one, this may not have been only their evaluation but perhaps the evaluation of the other churches in the region.

They had a reputation among them of being alive. It's also possible that there is a little bit of hyperbole going on in Jesus' statement, even irony, by saying you have the name or reputation of being alive, but you're actually dead. But, in any case, Jesus calls for them to repent, and to those who overcome, we find at least two promises given to them.

Again, these promises are clearly taken from the rest of the book, especially towards the end in chapters 19-22, which, in my opinion, all demonstrate or refer to what happens when Jesus comes to bring history to its conclusion at his second coming. The first one is that if they overcome this, they will be given white garments and dressed in white. Again, this language probably picks up what we find in the text, like in chapter 7. In chapter 7, we find sort of a preliminary, we said, revelation sort of cycle.

It has anticipations of the future reward of God's people in advance of the full exposition in 21 and 22. Already in chapter 7, we see a vision of God's people standing victorious before the throne, and we find, especially in verse 9, it says, after this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could number or count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. So, here's God's people standing victorious at the end of history and in God's presence.

They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. We find a similar language in chapter 19. And in chapter 19, this is where, after the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18, which we'll describe in the beginning of chapter 19, we'll deal with later.

In chapter 19, in verse 8, again, a reference to the glorified saints, the people of God who now stand victorious in God's presence. Verse 8 says, I'll back up and read 7, Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready, fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.

The bride is an image or symbol of the church, the glorified people of God, and now they are given linen or bright white linen to wear.

So, this promise now gets picked up in the promise made to the church at Sardis that they also will wear white garments if they overcome, that is, if they refuse to compromise. The garments are probably simply a symbol of their final salvation and perfection and, more specifically, a symbol of victory and even vindication. That now, vindication because they have suffered at the hands of the Roman Empire, they have maintained faithful witness in a hostile environment, even to the point of death, they will receive white robes as a symbol of their victory and their purity that now they possess in their final salvation, but also the vindication as well.

So that's the first promise made to them from later sections of Revelation. They will receive a white robe of purity, vindication, and victory. Second, they will also have their names in the Book of Life, but the assurance is that those names will not be blotted out.

When you read the rest of the Book of Revelation, you'll be introduced to a number of books or scrolls, starting in chapter 5. And here we're introduced to a book called the Book of Life, probably again not a literal book, but a book that is symbolic of the security of and the belonging of God's people to God himself. The book symbolizes their salvation. The book symbolizes the certainty of their salvation that they now possess.

Interestingly, the author tells them that their names will not be blotted out. Now this raises the question, is it possible for their names to be blotted out of this book? That is, it could be in there, but it could be taken out. That's entirely possible, but the emphasis on this text is not so much that it hangs in the balance. Are they going to have their names taken out or not?

This language of your names will not be blotted out is a figure of speech called litotes, which is a way of saying something by stressing its opposite or its negative. So, someone might say, how are you doing? And you might reply, not bad. That means you're doing good, but you state the opposite.

So, not blotting one's name out is a way of stating the opposite. God will keep you. You can be certain that you will reach the goal of your eschatological salvation if you overcome and persevere.

So, for the church of Sardis, and by the way, the book of life we'll see appears later on in the book of Revelation. So again, John is drawing on images of final eschatological salvation in the rest of the book to provide a motivation for overcoming in the present for his churches. So, for the church at Sardis, they would read the book of Revelation, as again, like other churches, as a warning, as a warning

not to participate in or not to be part of the pagan Roman Empire in its idolatrous practices and to compromise and accommodate with that, lest they find themselves the objects of the visions of judgment and the visions of plagues and judgments that God pours out upon Rome and upon a wicked, godless world if they refuse to repent.

Instead, again, for those who do maintain their purity, for those who do maintain their faithful witness, then they have the promise that they will participate in the eschatological salvation that God promises for his people, that is, white robes and being victorious and being vindicated and also the certainty that they will inherit their eschatological salvation in the future. The next church that we encounter in the book of Revelation is the church of Philadelphia in chapter 3, verses 7 through 13. The city of Philadelphia was an ancient city on, again, on this circular route.

It would have been a little bit southeast of Sardis, the previous city that we looked at. Along with Sardis, then, it was also devastated by this earthquake in AD 17. It was also important because of the influence of the emperor cult in the city and also other pagan gods and religions.

And what is significant about Philadelphia is it is the only other church, along with Smyrna, that receives a positive evaluation and does not include any rebuke or condemnation. Like Smyrna, it is a church that is suffering because it has maintained its faithful witness. So, when Jesus addresses the church in Philadelphia, this is what he says.

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write, These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 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, those 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. Since you have kept my commands to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

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

Never again will he leave it. I will write on him 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 him my new name.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So, we said Philadelphia, as we read those words, Philadelphia does not receive condemnation or a negative evaluation, but the evaluation is positive. The problem is the church is described as having little power.

Probably that means that they are socio and economically of little influence in the city of Philadelphia. They are a church of little significance. Perhaps they are unable then to protect themselves from the persecution that they are receiving, but they have remained faithful in their lives and in their witness.

Therefore, notice the title that is given to Christ in chapter 1. In chapter 3, the message to the church in Philadelphia, Jesus is described as the one who is holy and true and he holds the keys of David. That is, the one who now addresses them as holy, he is faithful and he also holds the keys of David. This, interestingly, is another allusion back to the Old Testament.

I think the key to understanding this and the key to understanding the open door, later on, Jesus tells the Philadelphian church, I have placed before you an open door. The key to understanding this is to understand the Old Testament background, which once again comes right out of the book of Isaiah and chapter 22. In Isaiah chapter 22, we read these words addressed to Eliakim, the king of Israel, the one who is the king on the throne in the line of David.

In chapter 22, I'm going to start with verse 20, but I'm going to read down to verse 24 of Isaiah 22. On that day, I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash about him. Interestingly, a parallel to the way Jesus is described in chapter 1. And hand your authority over to him.

He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and in the house of Judah. And I want you to notice that language of the Father. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David.

What he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. That was verse 22.

Then, 23, I will drive him like a peg into a firm place. He will be a seed of honor for the house of his father. All the glory of his family will hang on him.

It's offspring and offshoots. Notice that again, that language of offspring or seed. Also, an important theme in the Old Testament and in the Davidic covenant as well.

All its lesser vessels from the bowls to all the jars. The context of this then is Eliakim, as king who sits on David's throne, is now given the authority of David. And is now given the keys to the entrance into the kingdom or entrance into the palace.

He is portrayed, and Eliakim is almost portrayed as an administrator. And who can permit entrance or exclusion into the palace itself? And into the Davidic kingdom.

And the question is, how, then, does this get applied to Christ? How does a text as specific as Isaiah chapter 22 in reference to Eliakim now get applied to the person of Jesus Christ? First of all, we've already noted the connection with David a couple of times. Often, what was true of those who sat on the Davidic throne. This is true of a number of the so-called royal psalms that are applied to Jesus later on in the New Testament.

What often was true of those who sat on David's throne was also true of David's greater son, Jesus Christ. So, Jesus then would be seen as the ultimate one who has the keys and the authority. The keys are the symbol of authority of entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom.

From the Davidic kingdom that Jesus has now inaugurated. So, Jesus, as the true son of David, now has the authority of entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom of God. And from the Davidic kingdom that he has now inaugurated.

Furthermore, it's possible that Isaiah chapter 22 should also be read in light of Isaiah chapter 9 and 6:7. You remember the well-known text that we often read at Christmas time. Chapter 9 and starting with verse 6. For to us, a child is born; to us, a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders.

The language that appears in Isaiah chapter 22. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father. Which is a term applied to Eliakim in chapter 22.

Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom. Establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from this time on and from that time on and forever.

Now, Isaiah chapter 22 probably would have been read by John in light of chapter 9. That is the coming of a son to sit on the throne of David. To establish his rule forever and to reign in righteousness. The government would be upon his shoulders. So now Jesus Christ is that son of Isaiah chapter 9. Then also takes on the authority of chapter 22 as a Davidic king.

Who has the right, the keys, the authority to include, give entrance to, or to exclude from entrance into his kingdom? The second reason is probably in Isaiah chapter 22. John would have read Eliakim sort of typologically.

Typologically anticipating a greater son. Someone who would actually provide the climactic expression of someone who would come along. And take the keys that would signify the authority of inclusion and exclusion in the Davidic kingdom.

So Eliakim is probably to be understood as providing a type of or a model or pattern of a greater son who is to come along. Again, this receives even more corroboration if we read chapter 22 of Isaiah in light of chapter 9. And then finally notice interestingly in Isaiah chapters 22 and 23. In chapter 22, we find that in verse 23, Eliakim is compared to a peg.

I will drive him like a peg into a firm place. But notice later on in verse 25. In that day declares the Lord Almighty the peg driven into the firm place will give away.

It will be sheared off. It's almost as if this anticipates a time when that peg must be restored. And that peg must be driven back into its firm place.

Expecting that someone will come in the future to fulfill that. So, given all these things. The connection between Christ and David especially in light of Isaiah 9. The typological connection between Eliakim in Isaiah 22 and Jesus Christ.

And then also even within the context of 22. The breaking off of this peg. Almost anticipated that this peg would be restored.

All of this, then, I think, leads to identifying Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of not only Isaiah 9 but now also Isaiah chapter 22. That Christ now comes as the final son of David. Who now takes up the keys and has the authority to include or exclude from the kingdom of God.

That he is now established which will become important later on in Chapter 20 and in the following chapter. When Jesus Christ comes to establish his kingdom.

That ultimately issues in a new creation. Christ is the one who has the authority to include or exclude from entrance into his kingdom.

Interestingly though

in chapter 1 and verse 8 Jesus is described not as having the keys of the kingdom. But as the keys over death and Hades. And now in chapter 3. Christ is the one who has the keys to the kingdom of God.

In other words, it appears to me that the connection is. Christ overcoming death and Hades. Is the means by which Christ grants entrance into the kingdom of God.

But again, for those who refuse to acknowledge it. He excludes. And as we see at the end of Revelation,

They suffer the second death. And they end up in the lake of fire. We'll talk about those images later on.

But it's Christ overcoming death and Hades. He does so by granting entrance into the kingdom of God. And he possesses the keys and the authority to do so.

But shuts it from those who refuse to acknowledge. And who refuse to repent. But for the church that is suffering in Philadelphia.

This image would be good news that they have nothing to fear because it is Christ himself.

Who holds the keys over death and Hades? And who now holds the keys to the kingdom? And grants them entrance.

So, I think this is how we are to understand verse 8. In Revelation chapter 3 then and verse 8. In the message to the church at Philadelphia. Jesus says this. I know your deeds.

See, I have placed an open door before you. What is that open door? Traditionally, this has been understood. Especially in popular circles as a reference to evangelism.

He has given them an open door of witness. He has given them an open door to evangelism. However, in light of verse 7. In light of the connection with Isaiah 22.

Christ has the keys as symbols of authority. To permit entrance into or exclude entrance into the kingdom of God. The messianic kingdom.

The open door here is not a door of opportunity for evangelism. The open door is the entrance into the kingdom of God. And so now Jesus is assuring them.

They have an open door, and he is the one who holds the keys to death and Hades. He is the one who exclusively holds the keys that permit entrance.

He is the only one that permits entrance into the messianic kingdom. By overcoming death and hell and through his resurrection. And now he has given the Philadelphians an open door.

So, no matter what, they suffer. No matter how insignificant they seem. No matter how powerless they are in their situation.

They have already been granted entrance into the messianic kingdom. By the king, the son of David. Who holds the keys that grant entrance into the kingdom of God?

By the one who has through his death and resurrection. Conquered the power of death and Hades. Another significant aspect of this message to the church at Philadelphia

is found in verse 9. That is, in verse 9, he says. I will make those of you, those who are of the synagogue of Satan. Recall back to a couple of churches earlier.

That also struggled with those who. Interestingly, there is the church of Smyrna, the other church. That receives a positive evaluation.

Now, likewise, the Philadelphians seem to be suffering. Or receiving some measure of persecution. Because of the Jewish population in the city of Philadelphia, we probably were to understand this in a similar way that we did earlier. That is, it's highly possible that the Jews enjoyed protection. Under Roman rule, as a religion.

Were keen to distance themselves from this new religion. That we call Christianity. Some, especially local authorities; as we said, the persecution so far was not yet empire-wide. And officially sanctioned. But there would have been many at the local level who would have seen Christians as subversive. And refusing to accommodate. As to be refusing to conform.

And acting in a way that would show a lack of gratitude. Towards the gods and to Rome. And the Jews may have been keen to preserve their privileges under Roman rule to distance themselves from other Christians. And so, the reference here may be taken that way as those who claim to be Jews.

But they really are not. That is, they claim to be God's people. But they really are not.

Because of the fact that they actually persecute and they actually slander the Christians who are in the city of Philadelphia, but what is interesting is what is said about them.

John says actually, I will make them. That is the Jews who claim they are Jews. But really, they are not.

I will make them come and acknowledge that I have loved you. This is actually taken again from the book of Isaiah. Several texts sometimes write down Isaiah chapter 45 and verse 14. Isaiah 49 and verse 23. Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 14.

This idea is that the nations will come to Israel. And bow down and acknowledge them. And acknowledge that God has loved them.

Now interestingly, John reverses that. And he says actually it won't just be the nations who come. And bow down to the nation of Israel.

And acknowledge they are God's people. Now, these Jews who persecute God's people will come and bow down to the people of God.

The church in Philadelphia. And acknowledge that God loves them. So, John uses this text almost ironically.

Again, to assure the Philadelphians. Not only that, but they also had entrance into the messianic kingdom. Because Christ holds the keys.

But one day, those who persecute them. Even those who belong to the Jewish synagogue will bow down and acknowledge in the future that they are truly God's people.

The promise that Jesus gave to the Philadelphian church was twofold.

Starting in verse 10. First of all, Jesus promises that if they overcome. And again, for the Philadelphian church to overcome.

This means to maintain their faithful witness that they already have, to refuse to compromise if they overcome verse 10.

Christ promises that he will keep them from the hour of trial. Probably the hour of trial we'll see gets unpacked in more detail in Revelation chapter 4 and verse 21.

This probably then implies. In my opinion, there's a lot of debate. What does this entail? That they will be kept from the hour of trial.

John is probably not focusing so much on their physical removal from that. But it could equally imply. That God will simply keep them and preserve them.

That even in the midst of trial. And even in the midst of what is to come. In the rest of Revelation.

God will preserve them. So that they will not participate. Yes, the church is not promised preservation necessarily from persecution.

And especially at the hands of the Roman Empire. But when God pours out his judgment. This text promises that God will keep them. God will preserve them in the midst of that.

Second, the author then appeals directly to Revelation 21 and 22. With both temple and New Jerusalem imagery.

Notice he promises that they will be a pillar in the temple of God. And he also promises that they will participate in the New Jerusalem. That comes out of heaven.

Both of those images come right out of Revelation 21 and 22. In Revelation 21 John describes the New Jerusalem. Which comes out of heaven.

Comes down out of heaven. To be inhabited and inherited by the people of God. But interestingly this pillar imagery.

The image of a pillar in the temple of God. Also resonates with chapters 21 and 22. Because there the New Jerusalem is not only portrayed as a city.

It is clearly portrayed as a temple as well. The New Jerusalem is not only an end-time city. It's an end-time temple.

So, by using the image of a pillar in the temple of God. Then, I turned right around and used the language of New Jerusalem. John is saying the same thing as they will inherit the New Jerusalem slash temple of God. It's intriguing too. I wonder to what extent the pillar may also reflect the peg in the palace in the temple of Eliakim from Isaiah chapter 22. And now they are promised that they will participate in. Again, another way of saying.

They will participate in the final kingdom of God in the temple when Christ comes to restore it.

And to bring eschatological salvation to his people. We also see the anticipation of something here. We'll see in other places in Revelation.

And we find elsewhere in the New Testament. Such as Ephesians 2 and 1 Corinthians 3. Where temple imagery is applied to the people themselves. That is, the restored temple is not to be understood.

In terms of a physical structure. But in terms of the people themselves. The people now constitute the true temple of God.

And consistent again with other New Testament texts. So, the church in Philadelphia will read the rest of the book of Revelation. As number one.

They are protected from the plagues. And from the judgments that God pours out upon the earth. They will be protected from that.

And they will receive the promised salvation. Because of their faithful witness. And because of their endurance.

So, that brings us to the last church. The church of Laodicea. In chapter 3 verses 14 through 22.

This last church then kind of lies at the end of this circular route. It's about 45 miles or so from the city of Philadelphia. Southeast of it.

As I read this. This is probably one of the more disturbing messages to any of the seven churches. In chapters 2 and 3. And we'll see why.

Laodicea is a church that was also destroyed by an earthquake. It was actually destroyed by an earthquake in about AD 60. So only 30 years or so from the time that John is now addressing this church.

But the city was rebuilt. But interestingly, not with help from Rome. But from its own wealthy citizens.

From the wealth of its own citizens and inhabitants they rebuilt. They funded the rebuilding of the city.

What is well-known about the city of Laodicea? At least one factor that will come into play in another section of this letter. Or I'm sorry this message to the church in Laodicea. The city of Laodicea lacked one well-known requirement of any ancient city.

And that was a good water supply. One of the most important features and criteria for a city. Was not only a place that could be protected.

But it also must have a water supply. And that's one of the things that Laodicea lacked. In fact, as most realize, you can even see pictures of the aqueduct system.

Laodicea got its water by piping it in through an aqueduct, from elsewhere. Also, Laodicea was the center of worship for a number of foreign and pagan gods.

And again, the emperor cult was also influential in the city of Laodicea. And so, here's what Jesus says to the city of Laodicea. Or to the church of the city in Laodicea.

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 hot nor cold. I wish that you were either hot or cold. So, because you are lukewarm, I think I missed something. You are neither hot nor cold. 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. 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. I counsel you to buy

for me gold refined in fire. So, you can become rich and white clothes to wear, so, you can cover your shameful nakedness. And salve to put on your eyes so 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 I knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door. I will come in and eat with him and he with me. To him who overcomes I will give you the right to sit with me on my throne. Just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Although, some of the churches in chapters 2 and 3 receive both a positive and a negative evaluation. Laodicea's evaluation is solely negative.

Christ says nothing good, such as I know where you are. And I praise you for your faithfulness. And I praise you because you have done some good work.

But I have this against you. Instead, the entire evaluation of the church is negative. Christ has nothing good to say about the church at Laodicea.

Interestingly there is no persecution. There is no suffering. Instead, the problem appears to be a complete lack of wisdom.

And the horrid spiritual condition of the church. Due to their complacency and compromise brought about by their wealth. It's interesting.

Jesus does not seem to say anything about their compromise with pagan worship. And involvement in emperor worship. Although that may be implied.

But instead, Christ goes after their complete complacency. That is, they are so reliant on their own wealth and comfort in their situation. That they simply have no witness at all.

In fact, notice the language of wealth when Jesus tells them to buy gold refined with fire so that you can really be rich.

This is sort of the language of irony. That is, Jesus chides their physical wealth and their physical status. And says in reality you are poor because you lack true wealth. You lack true wealth which is spiritual.

And probably that language of gold. And for example, the language of eye salve. The city of Laodicea, as we have already seen, was known for its wealth.

That's how it rebuilt itself after the earthquake in 60 AD. But also, the fact that the reference to eye salve. This may reflect the fact that Laodicea had a medical school that was well known for producing eye salve.

Now, John uses that ironically to say that you are poor spiritually. In contrast to your socio-economic status, you are actually poor. And in contrast to the reputation of your medical center and the eye salve.

You are actually spiritually blind. So, he counsels them instead to get those things that actually promote spiritual wealth. And spiritual insight and spiritual sight.

The image from chapter 1 that is applied to Christ. He is seen as the Amen and the faithful witness. Which is the very thing that Laodicea was not.

They were not faithful witness. Instead, Jesus Christ is portrayed as the ruler of all creation. Interestingly, language is very similar to what one finds in a neighboring.

Addressed to a neighboring church. The church of Colossae in Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 and 20. Christ is the ruler of the church.

That is, he has the power over the church. He is in the situation of authority over their lives. And their wealth and their socio-economic situation.

So, the condition of the church is although one of physical wealth. And in an affluent prosperous environment. Spiritually that has led to extreme complacency.

And complete spiritual ineffectiveness. One might even say complete spiritual deadness. This I think helps us to understand Jesus words in verses 13 and 6 through 16

as well as utilizing what we know of the background of the Laodicean community. This all I think helps us to understand Jesus words in verses 13 through 16. That is that he condemns the church for being neither hot nor cold.

But instead, being lukewarm. Now, traditionally, we have understood this to mean. Well, the church in Laodicea.

The church in Laodicea is lukewarm. That is lukewarm is to be understood in the middle of or halfway between hot and cold. We treat hot and cold as binary opposites, with lukewarm in the middle. And usually, we equate those then. We equate hot, lukewarm and cold with spiritual temperature.

So hot would be to be on fire for Christ. And to be effective and a witness. Cold would be the opposite.

To be turned off and to be dead. And just unresponsive to the gospel. Lukewarm is in between.

It is sort of uncommitted. It is wishy-washy. It is half-hearted.

It is sort of riding the fence. Not wanting to take a stand for Christ. But not wanting to reject him either.

But just kind of a wishy-washy middle of the road Christianity. That is usually how this metaphor is understood. But I am convinced and follow a number of others who suggest that this is not what John had in mind. And the way to understand this.

It is important to read it in light of the cultural background of the Laodiceans. We already said. One of the interesting, intriguing features of Laodicea.

It lacked one of the most important criteria for a city. And that is to have a good water supply, instead through a system of an elaborate aqueduct.

It had its water piped in from elsewhere. Now, along with that. The other thing to recognize is.

Two other cities in the region of Laodicea. Very close to Laodicea. They were, in fact, known for their water supplies.

One of those was a city named Hierapolis. It was known for its hot springs. That was beneficial for medicinal purposes.

People would come from all over to bathe in these springs. If you have ever seen pictures of them.

It looks a little bit like. Those of you who have ever visited Yellowstone Park. In the United States of America, the mammoth hot springs. And all the bubbling hot springs. Hierapolis is not far from Laodicea. It was well known for its hot water supply. And again, people would come all over for their medicinal and healing value. The other city, Colossae, was also near Laodicea.

Was also known for its water supply. It was known for its cold and refreshing water. That was good to drink.

And so, you have Laodicea. Surrounded by two cities. Hierapolis and Colossae.

Known for their water supply. One for the hot water supply. One for the cold refreshing water supply.

But instead, Laodicea. Has to pipe its water in. And by the time it gets there.

It's tepid. It's stale. It's lukewarm.

It's not like the hot water of Hierapolis. That's good for healing. It's not like the cold, refreshing water of Colossae.

That's good for drinking. And refreshment. Instead, it's lukewarm.

It's good for nothing. In fact, it's so grotesque. That Christ says, I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth.

And you think about it. No one likes lukewarm water. A better analogy than.

A better analogy than spiritual temperature. I think would be this when you go into a restaurant.

Why does the waiter or waitress keep filling up your coffee cup? Your hot coffee cup. Because no one likes lukewarm coffee. Or why do they keep coming by and filling up your water glass? Because no one likes lukewarm or tepid stale water. We like it fresh.

In the same way, Jesus is calling on the church at Laodicea. I wish you were hot.

Like the hot water of Hierapolis, this is good for healing. Or I wish you were cold.

Like the cold, refreshing water of Colossae. Both cold and hot are positive things for John.

And for his readers. I wish you were like your neighboring cities. Who had good water?

Hot and cold. They're good for something. Instead, you're like your own water supply.

It's lukewarm. It is so gross and disgusting. It's good for nothing.

And it's so gross. I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth. So, lukewarm does not stand for wishy-washy, middle-of-the-road Christianity.

It stands for dead, ineffective, useless Christians. They have become so complacent in their wealth and in their situation that they are completely useless.

And completely ineffective witnesses for the person of Jesus Christ. The solution then, again, is unequivocal. That is to repent and to find true wealth, to find true eyesight, and to find true garments.

Again, even the language of garments. Wearing white garments as we said in Revelation.

Symbolizes overcoming, victory, and purity. That may also reflect the commerce of the city of Laodicea. But John's solution is to repent.

They have no other option to get out of their spiritual deadness. Their spiritual uselessness. Their spiritual poverty, blindness, and impurity.

And instead to repent and act as God's faithful witnesses. Notice 3:20 as a last instruction. A final instruction to the church.

Look at chapter 3:20. Which is one of the well-known texts. That often, again, I think, gets misread slightly because we fail to understand how it fits within the entire message to Laodicea.

In chapter 3:20. Christ describes himself in this way. He says, here I am. I stand at the door, and I knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door. I will come in and eat with him. And that person will eat with me.

Often, we've read this verse more individualistically. As an individualistic call to salvation. And I certainly want to say that this imagery could provide a fitting description of that.

But that's not what John is talking about. John is not talking about a call to individual salvation. Christ is standing, knocking at the door of our hearts, wanting to come in. Though that could be true, the picture here is more insidious.

Jesus Christ is seen as standing outside of his church. Not welcome in it. The Laodicean church has become so complacent and ineffective

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It is so reliant on its wealth and status in society. And its surroundings. That Jesus Christ is no longer welcome in his church.

And stands outside of his church. The only solution is to open the door. And allow him to come back in and share a meal.

Perhaps a reference to the fact that the church has celebrated feasts. Including communion. Maybe a reference to the love feast or something like that and communion which is almost even more ironic. If this is a reference to the church celebrating a feast.

And celebrating communion together. Then Jesus Christ, all of a sudden, is left out of that. And excluded from that.

And now he is asking to be welcomed back into his church. And to be present and at the center of his church again. The one who walks around the lampstands.

He is now asking to be at the center of his church as well. So, for the Laodicean church. They must stop compromising.

They must stop their sense of complacency. And comfort in reliance on their wealth. And their socioeconomic status.

And instead, they must let Christ. The ruler of creation. The faithful witness.

Come into their midst. And back into the center of their church. And they, too, then, must become Christ's faithful witnesses.

No matter what the consequences. Notice, too, the promise that is given to them if they overcome.

To the one who overcomes. I will give the right to sit with me on my throne. Just as I overcame.

In other words. If the Laodiceans repent, that is if they overcome by repenting.

Refusing to compromise. By ceasing to live lives of complacency. By allowing Christ back into their midst by becoming Christ's faithful witnesses. Suppose they overcome in that way. Christ promises that they will rule with him.

It's sort of interesting that this promise of them doesn't quite fit in some respects.

You wonder how it actually fits their situation. Well, in one sense, you can see. By promising them rule.

That would be motivation for getting out of their spiritual stupor. But on the other hand. I wonder if perhaps.

This promise is deliberately meant. More of a general promise. To prepare us for chapters 4 and 5. In chapters 4 and 5. We find God and the Lamb.

Seated on the throne. And ruling in heaven. And their sovereignty is acknowledged by all of heaven.

And ruling over the entire earth. And now, in preparation for that. The church of Laodicea.

Other churches are probably promised participation in that. If they overcome, so perhaps this is more of a general.

A general promise. To the church of Laodicea. In preparation for the vision that comes next.

In 4 and 5. Where God and the Lamb on their throne. Is at the center. So, for the Laodiceans.

They will read the rest of the book of Revelation. As a rather stern warning of judgment. They will read the rest of the plagues and the judgments of God in Revelation as falling on them if they refuse to repent.

They will read the rest of the book of Revelation. As an attempt to shock them out of their complacency. And to get them to pursue true wealth.

And true sight. And true purity. That comes only by faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

And faithful witness for Christ. No matter what the cost. So, at this point, first of all, we've seen Christ diagnose the situation in his churches. Only two of them have been faithful to the point of suffering for their faithfulness. The others have. Most of them have some.

Something they've done right. But most of them receive. A rather negative evaluation.

Most of them are lacking something. That Christ draws attention to. And one of them.

The Laodicean church receives a wholly negative evaluation. The problem with all of these, to some degree, is compromise. And accommodation with the pagan Roman environment. That is the idolatry.

Worship of pagan gods. Involvement in emperor worship. Often in connection with their commercial life.

The difficulty is refusal to separate from that. Some of them may have been willing to compromise precisely to avoid persecution and being ostracized. Perhaps even losing jobs. Others may have simply been so complacent.

That they needed to be woken up. And shocked into understanding. And seeing the gravity of the situation.

And what it was they were doing. But most of them were compromising to some degree. With the pagan Roman Empire.

And the pagan society in which they found themselves. So, chapters two and three. Then, speak to various situations.

That was the church in the first century. And I would add the church today. And every other century.

Finds itself in. Not just persecution. And I would say at least for many churches today, especially in the West. Seldom is persecution, which is the main problem they face. Second.

We then see chapters two and three. Will determine how each of the churches. Read the rest of the book of Revelation.

Or how the rest of Revelation. Apply specifically to each church. And then finally we've said.

Starting with chapter four. In chapters four through twenty-two. Chapters four through twenty-two.

Will reinterpret. From a symbolic. From an apocalyptic perspective.

Chapters four through twenty-two. Will from a visionary perspective. Interpret what John has actually said.

In chapters two and three. The last thing I want to mention. Is the phrase that we have overlooked.

And that is at the end. Along with the promises. Sometimes before.

Sometimes right after. Along with the promise. We have the message.

He who has an ear. Let him hear what the Spirit says of the churches. That is with chapters two and three.

We find the need for spiritual discernment. To see what is wrong with the churches. The only way for the churches.

To wake up from their situation is the only way for the churches to maintain their faithful witness even in the face of persecution. The only way for the church to understand its complacency, its compromise, and its spiritual blindness. It needs to maintain its faithful witness.

It is by having spiritual insight. Into the situation of the church. And chapters two and three.

Provide the insight that is necessary. For the church to. Especially the churches that compromise.

To wake up. And discern their situation. And to discern.

What is the rest of the book of Revelation? Says to the people of God. This simply reinforces.

That chapters four through twenty-two. Is not meant to simply predict the future. And to provide us with information.

To help us figure out. What is going to happen in the future, and where are we?

To plot our existence in some timeline. That shows how close we are to the end. Instead, Revelation chapters four through twenty-four.

Requires spiritual insight. It requires understanding and the eyes of the spirits, the sevenfold Spirit. To help us to grasp and understand. The true situation of the church.

And what is at stake. And what God requires of his church. If they are to respond to him in obedience.

And if they are to maintain their faithful witness. In a hostile pagan environment. And to maintain that witness.

No matter what the cost. Having looked at the messages to the seven churches. In chapters two and three.

We are now prepared to move ahead. And to begin to read. And to begin to consider.

The visionary, kind of the apocalyptic portion. Of chapters four through twenty-two. So, what I propose we do then is we will continue to move. We will move through chapters four through twenty-two. And starting with chapters four and five.

Sort of the entry point into the beginning point. Of John's vision. We will look at the main function of the vision overall.

And we will also ask how it might relate, back to the situation of the churches in chapters two and three. But look at the overall function and its context.

But then also look at some of the details. And especially some of the more important or interesting ones or problematic details
in the form of language, symbols, and images. And so, in doing this, try to come to a greater understanding of the main function and purpose of the different sections and parts of the vision that we find. In the remainder of the book.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's course on the book of Revelation. This is session 7, The Seven Churches of Revelation: Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.