

Revelation 3B (2011)

- The sixth letter to Philadelphia

SLIDES 3-11, 12

[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, as we all know

SLIDE 3-13

- The city 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
 - It’s main disadvantage was the high frequency of earthquakes which frequently damaged the city

- In 17 AD, a strong quake rocked the city and many were so scared to return for fear of being crushed by the falling Greek architecture
- A large number decided to remain in the surrounding countryside
- This pattern inhibited the growth of the city while creating a culture of persistence and even courage among the city's determined populace
- The description of Christ is of the One Who is holy and true
 - Their leader reminds them that He represents perfection and truth
 - And He has the key of David
 - The mention of David is a reference to all that David represents,
 - Specifically to the throne of David
 - To the city of David, Jerusalem
 - And taken together, they represent the Kingdom, the city of the righteous by faith
 - Jesus reminds the city that He holds the key of David, like a mayor saying he has the key to the city
 - In this case, if Jesus has the key to the Kingdom and what He opens remains open, and what He closes, remains closed
 - Keeping with the metaphor of keys and doors, the imagery is pretty striking
 - As with everything else we've seen in the letters, Jesus is in complete control of where the Gospel is going and where it will be received
 - The open door - opened by the One with the key - represents a time and place where the message of the Gospel will be received
 - And conversely, the closed door represents a time and place where Jesus shuts the door of opportunity for the Gospel to reach receptive ears
- Before looking at Jesus' commendation, consider the meaning of this description carefully

- It's relatively easy to accept the first half of Jesus statement
 - The Gospel can only penetrate where He opens doors spiritually
- But it's another thing to hear the second half and understand it fully
 - Jesus at times is also at work to close doors for ministry and bring our work to an end
 - And not just our work, but the work of the church and the Gospel itself
- Many pastors, teachers, church leaders, missionaries and the like struggle for many years in ministry before grasping this fact
 - Usually when we struggle to find fruit in ministry, we assume that we should simply redouble our efforts and try harder
 - And perhaps there are cases where this is exactly Jesus' desire
 - But if we take Jesus' words at their most literal, we understand an open doors to result in an increase even if we lack strength or wisdom to carry it out properly
 - On the other hand, we must also accept the corollary, that when Jesus is intent on closing the door, even our best efforts will go nowhere in spreading the Gospel
- Clearly, we should endeavor to work where Jesus is working
 - In fact, consider Jesus' commendation to the church in the next verse
 - He says He opened a door for them (in terms of the Gospel) which no one can shut
 - They will have success in reaching out with the Gospel
 - And He gives them this success because they are weak and have remained true to the One Who is true and holy
 - The church in Philadelphia was a small church, in keeping with the stunted city growth, but it was a strong, faithful little church
- This is a church that will find reaching the unbeliever in that city a fruitful ministry

- Perhaps the threat of death and the uncertainty created a good environment to teach about the Rock
- As a result of their faithfulness to the mission of the church, they have no condemnation
 - Notice that the two churches with no condemnation from Christ are the ones that maintain their testimony under persecution, keep the faith and keep His word
 - The formula for success is simple...but demanding
- Jesus' promise to the church was to defend and protect them
 - The Jews who were persecuting the Christians in the Diaspora would travel to new cities looking for Christians trying to stamp out the movement
 - These men were lying Jews in the same sense as those in the church in Smyrna
 - They were born of Abraham but had no relationship with the living God
 - A true Jew in God's eyes is not the one born physically of Abraham, but the one born of Abraham in the flesh AND of the Spirit in faith
 - Jesus promised to turn those Jews who persecuted the church into believers as a result of their preaching
 - Furthermore, Jesus promises to keep them from the hour of testing because they keep His word of perseverance
 - This church had received a mission from Christ to serve in this city
 - This was the "door" Christ opened
 - But the city wasn't particularly impressive
 - The circumstances were difficult
 - So remaining here and working for the Gospel required perseverance
 - But this was the place where the door was opened

- To go elsewhere would have been to leave the open door and encounter closed doors elsewhere
- So Jesus says their perseverance in His word will result in a reward, to avoid the hour of testing
- The term hour of testing refers to a short period of time, but not necessarily an hour exactly
 - The term “hour” is commonly used in prophetic texts to indicate a short time, but it can be months or even years
 - The term “testing” refers to a severe judgment from God
- Notice the other important detail
 - This coming hour of testing will come upon the whole earth
 - This is an important confirmation that the content of these letters has been intended from the beginning to apply beyond the days of John
 - There was no such “hour” in the day of John or in the time of the church of Philadelphia which impacted the whole earth
- This hour of testing refers to the time of tribulation, which we will begin to study over the next few weeks
 - It’s the only time of testing that can meet the test of impacting the whole earth
- This church is promised to avoid that period
 - Even though this promise was intended primarily for a future period in the church history, nevertheless it still had relevance for the church in Philadelphia
 - This church - like all churches in John’s day - had received teaching from Paul and the other Apostles concerning the coming end days
 - And they knew that a great tribulation was due to come upon the world
 - Paul wrote about it to the church in Thessalonica less than 300 miles away

- No one knew how far away that might be, so this promise brought this church reassurance
- Jesus' exhortation to this church is equally simple
 - I am coming quickly so hold fast what you have
 - And don't let anyone take your crown
 - These statements reflect the strong focus of the church to serve Christ faithfully
 - Jesus says, "You're on the right track, you're winning your race in serving Me. Now, the race is almost over, so keep running hard so you don't lose your award."
- Finally, as He does with every letter, Jesus declares what the overcomer (believer) has in store
 - The overcomer will be (like) a pillar in the temple of heaven
 - And the overcomer will never have to come and go from the temple, but like a pillar will remain there permanently
 - To a city accustomed to running out of buildings at the slightest tremor, this was a poignant and powerful comparison
 - Heaven puts an end to that fear
 - And they will have a new name (similar to Pergamum)
 - And they will have a new city, the city of God
 - They move up from the poor city to the richest city
 - And God will mark them with His Name
- So what period of church history does this letter represent?
 - We know it begins after the church of Reformation
 - And though the reformation movement itself was a good thing for the church, the Reformation Church itself still had it's problems
 - For about a hundred years after the Reformation, there was virtually no missionary work within the church

- But the true Church was set free by the Lord from those constraints in the decades following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648
 - So we mark the time of this church period as beginning with that treaty
- In the decades following the Peace, the church experienced a remarkable rebirth, characterized by a worldwide missionary movement
 - Countless small, splinter groups of churches formed throughout Europe
 - But soon they encountered severe persecution by both Catholics and Protestants
 - Just as the Reformation church took the mantle of Jesus' church away from the Catholic institution, now the same happened to the Reformation church at the hands of the Missionary church
 - Pilgrims, Anabaptists and others headed to the new world
 - 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 well beyond the establishment
- And this church age was assured it will not extend long enough to reach the time of testing
 - This is a true church, preaching the gospel, holding to what is holy and true (Jesus)
 - As such, it will not endure the testing, which is a blessing
 - Sadly, it will largely be gone by the time the last period begins

- So the age is roughly 1648-1900, based on the history of the missionary movement

SLIDE 3-14

- And based on a new movement that arose in that last decade of the nineteenth century
- A movement that directly contributed to the rise of the final church period, the church of Laodicea

- Complete chart...
- Moving to the last and most important church

SLIDE 3-15

[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
 - In fact, when the city was destroyed in 60 AD, it refused to accept Imperial aid, which was customarily extended to cities rebuilding after disasters

SLIDE 3-16

- 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 control
 - And to demonstrate they were self-sufficient
- 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-renown 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 is the true Witness
 - A witness is one who can testify to the truth
 - Jesus is the One Who testifies to the Truth in all respects
 - Not "a" a truth, but all truth
 - Interestingly, Jesus also describes Himself as the Beginning of creation
 - This is a reference to the Alpha and Omega in Rev 1
 - Why this reference?
 - As we'll see in a minute, the testimony of creation becomes an essential factor in this church period
- Jesus begins by declaring that He knows their deeds, as He has said before

- But to this church, Jesus says He knows that are neither hot nor cold
 - Notice it's not their deeds that are hot or cold
 - It's the people themselves
- What do these symbols mean?
 - Hot and cold suggest a dichotomy
 - Two mutually exclusive positions
 - You can't be both hot and cold
 - So Jesus says He would rather them be one or the other
- Instead, He says they are lukewarm
 - What does this symbol mean?
 - If you ask me whether I agree with you on some question, and I say I am lukewarm, what did I communicate to you?
 - I'm suggesting I'm in agreement with you (or leaning that way) but without actually saying yes
 - In reality, I am saying no in a polite way so as to avoid a confrontation
 - Because if I agreed, wouldn't I simply say yes?
 - So to some question or position or identity, Jesus says He wishes they were one or the other rather than pretending in between
 - The nature of the question becomes clear as we look further down the letter
- Skipping to v.17, Jesus admonishes them repeating that they say they are wealthy and in need of nothing, they don't know their true condition
 - They are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked
 - Since we know the church in Laodicea was actually quite prosperous
 - And it was not universally blind, and it wore clothes

- Therefore, we understand Jesus intended these statements as descriptions of their spiritual condition (not their physical condition)
 - So what does it mean to be wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, spiritually speaking?
 - Without much debate, we understand these statements to refer to someone in need of the salvation that comes from grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - They are unbelievers
 - But they think themselves wealthy and in need of nothing
 - Jesus is saying that their physical prosperity has blinded them to their spiritual needs
 - While they are self-satisfied and secure in their earthly wealth, they remain in jeopardy of spiritual judgment for their sin of unbelief
- Now we see the meaning of hot and cold
 - One extreme stands for confessing belief (likely hot)
 - The true believer, public confessing Christ and secure in their faith
 - While the other stands for transparent unbelief (cold)
 - The confident unbeliever who makes no claims to belief in Christianity and doesn't associate with the church
 - What does lukewarm represent?
 - Jesus gave us the answer
 - Lukewarm describes the person who says I have everything but is actually in need of salvation
 - In a sense, they are professing an association with Christianity, but they have yet to come to know Christ
 - They are the false confessor
 - Why does Jesus say He would rather this person be hot or cold?
 - Wouldn't we expect Him to say I wish you were hot, not cold?

- Well, in a sense He is saying the same thing
- He is saying that if you're not with me, I would rather you be clearly against me than to pretend you are one of mine
 - A wolf in sheep's clothing is much more dangerous to the flock than a wolf out in the open
- To this person, Jesus says in v.16 I will spit you out
 - The Greek language is even more graphic...Jesus says vomit out
 - Some have suggested the lukewarm person is a believer living a life that reflects poorly on their faith...a bad witness
 - But this is language precludes that interpretation
 - Jesus doesn't "vomit out" His children because we fail to show good works or because we lack a good witness
 - Furthermore the earlier description of blindness and poverty speaks to unbelief clearly
 - The church in Laodicea would have been particular attuned to this metaphor
 - The city of Laodicea was situated in a valley surrounded by mountains
 - Two streams of mountain waters flowed into the valley and joined at Laodicea
 - One stream came from the southeast near a place called Denizil
 - The water from this stream were cold and refreshing
 - A second water source originated near Herapolis
 - This source was a mineral hot spring used for medicinal baths
 - The water tasted badly from the sulfur
 - In Laodicea, the two streams combined, producing a foul tasting lukewarm water

SLIDE 3-17

- 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, and in v.18 Jesus gives His exhortation to this church
 - Jesus advises or counsels them to purchase (obtain) from Christ gold refined by fire so they might become rich
 - This gold, refined by fire, refers to eternal treasure
 - In contrast to earthly wealth
 - They should buy white garments to clothe themselves
 - Here the garments refers to the robes worn by believers as their works of righteousness
 - Remember, they are naked, in contrast to the believer with insufficient works in Sardis who had “soiled” robes
 - To be naked is to be without salvation
 - And they need eye salve to see
 - Seeing in spiritual terms means to come to a knowledge of God’s truth
 - Did you notice that the metaphors Jesus used correspond to the city’s chief industries?
 - Jesus continues to emphasize that this church relies on it’s worldly prosperity as its measure of worth and it’s using the wrong measure
- Finally, Jesus says that to one He loves, He will reprove and discipline them
 - Consider what He’s saying here
 - This church is doing well, has everything, and is not suffering in anyway
 - And they view this set of circumstances as a good sign and evidence that they are in need of nothing

- Jesus turns that on it's head and says the way you will know I love you is that you experience my reproof and discipline
 - And the fact that things are going so well for you is a bad sign
 - It shows that you are not the ones I love
- Like the writer to Hebrews said:

[Heb. 12:4](#) You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

[Heb. 12:5](#) and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

I "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

[Heb. 12:6](#) FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,

I 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. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[Heb. 12:9](#) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

[Heb. 12:10](#) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

[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.

- A sign that we are a son (or daughter) of God is that we receive discipline when we need it
 - If life goes on without discipline, we have reason to worry
- In v.20 Jesus gives His personal invitation for this church to come into faith
 - He to the one who hears Jesus' voice, they may come in and dine with Him
 - So the opportunity for faith is not gone even in this unbelieving church
 - And then to the one who does overcome, Jesus assures him that they will rule with Jesus

- Keep in mind that this church is called “the people ruling”
 - This is a church that respects individualism and self-determinism
 - But that independence has led them to be a church without an appreciation for their need before God
 - Jesus says they can have an opportunity to rule as they desire, but only with Him
- To end, let’s consider the church age
 - By now, it should be obvious that the seventh church will be the last age prior to the end
 - And it’s the age we live in now
 - This is the age of the Apostate Church
 - Apostasy means to leave something that was previous held
 - The sense here is not with respect to a certain individual
 - We’re not talking about a person coming to faith and then leaving the faith, though that happens
 - We’re talking about the entity of the church overall
 - Where before it was a faithful church as in Philadelphia
 - 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 world

[2Th. 2:1](#) Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

[2Th. 2:2](#) that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

[2Th. 2:3](#) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

- He also describes some of the aspects of this falling away in a letter to Timothy:

[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.

- Forbidding marriage and food is happening today...

SLIDE 3-18

- Paul goes on to give more detail in his second letter to 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.

- The effects of the apostate church are self-evident in the culture around us
 - This list in 2Tim 3 are a perfect description of the nature of society today
 - And while the world is at a lost to explain the causes, the Bible explains it succinctly
 - The church is apostate because it fails to teach the word

[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.

- What are these myths and doctrines of demons that brought about this falling away in the church?
 - The transition from the Missionary church to the Apostate church began principally as a result of two movements
 - Jesus alludes to both of these movements in his description of Himself to the church of Laodicea
 - 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, these scholars argued that the Bible must be understood as a flawed work of men and must be interpreted accordingly
 - They questioned authorship of the books of Bible, the dates of authorship and other details of Scripture 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
 - They new thoughts caused divisions and disagreements in the church, but 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 in churches
 - 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 particularly in the 20th century weakened confidence and reliance on scripture among many denominations and their congregations

- This too was promised in Scripture

[2Pet. 3:3](#) Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

[2Pet. 3:4](#) and saying, “ Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”

[2Pet. 3:5](#) For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,

[2Pet. 3:6](#) through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

[2Pet. 3:7](#) But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

- The worldwide acceptance of the bankrupt theory of Evolution directly contradicted Scripture and gave fuel to Biblical criticism
 - It was all the easier to claim that the Bible wasn't to be understood literally
 - Evolution is one of the Enemy's greatest assaults upon the truth of God's word and one that has captivated the entire world
- We are living in the apostate church of the last days
 - The church with people ruling, rather than with Christ ruling through His word
 - Being part of this church age is both a burden and a privilege
 - We are privileged to be near the end
 - But we carry the burden of a weak and apostate church community
 - And as believers, we are among the (few) overcomers of the last days
- Obviously, the church age has no end
 - But let's look at our chart

SLIDE 3-19

SLIDE 3-20