

Today we move on to Chapter 3.. the last 3 letters of the 7 letters to Churches. Last week we looked at the first 4 letters... to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira. These last 3 we look at today are most important to us for two reasons... first, they represent the time period closest to us, so it is most familiar to us... and also they point to the culmination of God's work of building His Church until that soon coming time He has planned and promised to remove the Church... us... at the Rapture.

Remember, in Chapter 1:19, Jesus told John to... Write... 1. the **things which you have seen**... 2. and the **things which are**... 3. and the **things which will take place after this**.

This is the key to understanding Revelation... this is how we rightly divide **this** Word of Truth...

The 1st division... The **things which you have seen** is the Glorified Lord Jesus Christ standing among 7 lamp stands with 7 stars in His right hand.

The 2nd division of Revelation... **the things which are**... is what we read in these 7 letters to 7 specific Churches at the time which also represent 7 succeeding eras in Church history... a prophetic picture of the condition of the Church as a whole down through its yet to come 1900 year *history*.

then the 3rd division of Revelation... the **things which will take place after this... after what?... after the time of the 7 letters representing the time of the Church on Earth... after the removal of the Church at the beginning of Chapter 4, after the Rapture... the things which will take place after this.**

We will begin to look at that time next week, which includes the Tribulation, Armageddon, and The Second Coming with us, the true Church accompanying the returning King of Kings and Lord of Lords as His Bride, the Millennium with us ruling and reigning with The Lord Jesus Christ, the Final Judgment and the New Heavens and New Earth, then Eternity... actually, we are in eternity now.

Again... the Tribulation period... this coming 7 year period... this week of years... is the final, 70th week of years prophesied in Daniel chapter 9... **the 70 weeks of Daniel**. Revelation is actually a continuation or culmination of the Book of Daniel. Daniel was told to seal up his book until the time of the end... John was told to not seal it up because ***the time is at hand***... we are living in that time now... we are in the last days of the last days leading up to the Rapture, the Tribulation and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords and King of Kings when He will set up His Kingdom on Earth, from Jerusalem and we will rule and reign with Him for a thousand years.

This is all true, literal reality... what's coming and almost here.

We left off in chapter 2 after the letter to the Church at Thyatira, representing the Papal, Roman Church until about the time of the Reformation in the early 1500's. Now we move to chapter 3 and the 5th letter to the Church at Sardis.

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, **but you are dead**. Be watchful, and ***strengthen the things which remain***, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white

garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

This letter represents the time of the Church from the Reformation forward... a little over 200 years.

The Reformation was a great thing, a time of God's beginning to awaken His Church. The 'Reformers'... Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, Bunyan, Tyndale and many others... they began to be awakened to the lost reality of Salvation by Grace through Faith, the Doctrine of Justification by Faith... and they were responsible for the Bible being opened once again to the people... being translated to common languages, especially German and English. Remember, the Scriptures had been imprisoned by Catholicism... Kept in Latin, hidden from the people... it was a capital crime, punishable by death to have or even read a Bible unless you were a priest... remember, this was the time of the Nicolaitans... victory over the laity... the ever more powerful priestly caste.

But the Reformation was not a great leap forward... it was a breaking free from the darkness and prison of Catholicism for some... a remnant... the true Church is always a remnant... but there was still only a little life, a little light.

It was as if they had been trapped in the dark, dank bowels of a prison galley... with no hope of escape... do you remember from the movie, Ben Hur?... Charlton Heston is down chained in the prison ship... rowing day in and day out... knowing that death is the only escape. But then his ship is rammed by another and he is cast out into the sea, on a raft of debris...

That's how it was at the Reformation... They'd been rescued from the prison galley of Catholicism, but they were still cast onto a sea of hopelessness. They had regained the understanding of Salvation by faith through God's Grace, but they had not yet regained the knowledge and understanding of God's promise of the Second Coming of Christ and all that would surround it. They had failed to recover, to grasp what Paul calls our blessed hope... our hope in Christ and His return for us... in His promises to us, the Church, and also for Israel. Without that blessed hope, all we have is the hopeless waiting until our death to then make it to Heaven. Just like one cast upon the sea from a sinking ship... alone, on a raft in the middle of a vast, endless ocean... without hope of rescue... just waiting to die.

To this day, most of the Churches that came out of the Reformation continue to believe the false teaching of Amillennialism... that there will be no literal Millennium, no Rapture or Tribulation, no restored Israel... This willful unbelief in what God's Word clearly teaches it is what fuels and continues to feed the growing Apostasy leading to the Reception of Antichrist.

Jesus refers in the letter to this coming problem with their understanding when He says, 'Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.' To those watching and waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ at the Rapture, He does not come as a thief... He comes as a loving Bridegroom for His bride and Paul tells the Thessalonians that we are not in darkness that the day should overtake us as a thief. 1 Thes 5:4

The Reformers, though they were saved, they were without that hope and joy. Their religion remained formal, ritualistic, stoic, without joy... legalistic... following rules and regulations.

They recovered a little life and light, but much remained dead still.

In 1 Thes 1:9 Paul says of the Thessalonians, '...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

He was once more reiterating the importance of our blessed hope in waiting expectantly for Jesus' return for us in the clouds, and the promise of the Rapture and removing us from the time of the Tribulation.

The Reformers had turned back to God from the idols of Catholicism, but they had failed to understand to be waiting expectantly for His return and His promise of the Rapture.

The 'Sardis Period' of the Church ran from the early 1500's until about the middle 1700's.

About verse 5: 'He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.'

This verse has been greatly misunderstood and used to malign God's character and promises... they say, 'See... you can lose your salvation... He'll blot your name out if you aren't good enough or you don't stay good enough.' But in fact, Jesus is saying just the opposite here.

Remember... John told us in 1 John 5:5 who is an overcomer... 'Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?' He tells us that every true child of God is an overcomer because we are in Christ and He is in us and He is the One Who has overcome the World for us... we are overcomers.

Remember, we said that all these promises at the end of each of these letters are for every true believer... and that is exactly what Jesus is saying here... 'Your name will never be blotted out.'

At that time, in the 1st Century... in every city, there was a book, a record of every citizen of the city... a book of life. When you were born or when you moved there, your name was written in. When you died, it was removed, but also... if you committed a serious crime or betrayed the city somehow... your name would be blotted out from the book of life of the City... you would lose all rights and privileges of citizenship.

What Jesus is saying here is just the opposite... He is saying, I am not like your Earthly officials. When I give you eternal life, it is forever... I will keep you and preserve you... I will cause you to be an overcomer... I am the One Who will present you faultless before My Father's throne... I will never blot your name out of my Book of Life... you are my child forever... I love you and I will keep you forever.

The 6th Letter...

⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens"; "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My

name.⁹ Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie— indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 *I will write on him* My new name.

¹³ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Philadelphia Church speaks prophetically of the true Church of the last days. Around the middle of the 18th Century God began to open the eyes of some of His people to the truth of His promises regarding the end times and His return, the restoration of Israel, His command to go into all the World and preach the Gospel... in short... the truth of His Word and the completeness of His Salvation.

The Philadelphia Church had a little strength, like one just coming back to life... weak but gradually growing stronger and stronger. They had discovered His Word in the Sardis period and they had kept and treasured it. Now they discovered that God had opened wide the doors of Evangelism around the World. Missionaries began to go out from England and then from America. They went to China, India, Japan, Korea, Africa, Burma, the Pacific and around the World and God caused great growth and expansion in the Church.

Here He gives another promise to the true Church concerning the end times and the Rapture.¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will ***keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world***, to test those who dwell on the earth.¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Here, to the true Church, He promises to keep them ***from*** the Tribulation... the trial upon the WHOLE World. The Greek word He uses here for keep you FROM is EK... it means '***out of... away from***' it doesn't mean 'to be protected *in* or *through*'... it means ***out of, away from***...¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will ***keep you out of and away from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world***, to test those who dwell on the earth.

He says, 'Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.' This is not a promise of something... it is a statement and a command. 'I am coming quickly... ready or not! Hold fast or you will lose some rewards... not your salvation... Crowns are indicative of rewards...

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. 1 Cor 2:9 Rewards!

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one ***according to his work***. Rev 22:12

The Philadelphia Church represents the true Church of the last days... from the mid 18th Century through today until the Rapture... but in these last days of the last days... it has become a remnant... we

are a remnant. The final Church of Revelation is growing stronger and stronger, swallowing more and more of the true Church.

The final Church of the 7 letters of Revelation began to grow strong around the middle of the last Century. The missionaries continued, the revivals continued but error and apostasy began to creep in. It started slowly but grew stronger until today it is everywhere... it is growing in all the Churches, Bible Schools and Seminaries... everywhere!

Letter 7: "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also 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."'

Remember... each of these 7 letters dictated by the Lord Jesus Christ to John is addressed to a specific, real Church and that together, they give a prophetic picture of the entire time of the Church on Earth and how the characteristics of each particular Church will be dominant at the time... but also that the characteristics of each Church are characteristics of different parts of the Church, as a whole, throughout the entire time. There has always existed a backslidden Church like Ephesus, a persecuted Church like Smyrna, a compromising Church like Pergamos, a corrupt Church like Thyatira, a dead Church like Sardis, a faithful Church like Philadelphia and a lukewarm nauseating Church like Laodicea... but Laodicea is different... although Laodicea is a real place with a real Church, this letter is addressed not to the Church **at** Laodicea, like all the others... this one is address to the Church **of the** Laodiceans, as if Laodiceans would be scattered throughout the entire Church through all the time of the Church... like a disease. And now... in these last days, Laodiceans are making up the bulk of the Church... Churches today are filled with Laodiceans... it is the great Apostasy that Paul warned would take place before the Rapture and Tribulation.

They aren't people who have left the Church...they fill the Church... they have left their first love... they've compromised the truth of God's Word... they've become corrupt... they've become spiritually dead and lukewarm. They fill the Television airwaves. There are so called Christian TV stations and networks that are almost entirely dead, deceiving apostatizing Laodiceans.

These are the ones who fill Church pews... these are the ones of whom Jesus said... '**Many** will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I **never knew you**; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:22 Not, I used to know you... I never knew you.

They fill Churches and pulpits... they are hot, on fire for many things... they are hot for a gospel of prosperity, healings, self-realization and fulfillment. They are hot for seeking after imitation signs and wonders. They are hot for a social gospel filled with good works to make them feel good about their own self-righteousness. They are hot for positive confession and positive thinking. Of predominance, they are **hot for money**... money is the answer to everything. Live your best life now.

They say we are rich because God is pleased with us... we have need of nothing. But all their wealth with rot away and burn up in God's judgment. They say, 'We see the light... we are awakened and enlightened!'... but they are blind to truth and spiritual things. They dress themselves in multi thousand dollar suits and dresses and spiked heels but God says they are naked, never having been clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are hot and on fire for false revivals and many other things... but ask them about the truth of the Gospel, preaching to the lost and their need of God's Salvation, of Heaven and Hell, of sin and forgiveness, of God's promises and prophecy of the end times, of His command to 'Walk in a manner worthy of the your calling.'... to 'Seek first His Kingdom'... to 'Watch and wait expectantly for His imminent return'... about these things... their answer is...'Eh... not so much.' 'We're not really into that old fashioned stuff... we're a modern day Church of modern day people... we're hip and with it. We're cool... especially toward that stuff... you might even say we're... *lukewarm* regarding all that old fashioned doctrine type stuff.

The Church began in faith and belief. The Gospel spread and believers were ready to die for their faith. But it wasn't long before their faith began to cool and false teachers began to bring in false teaching and false doctrine. The Church slid further and further into darkness and heresy over hundreds of years until God awakened His remnant, the true Church to the recovery of the truth of Salvation through faith by God's Grace. Then he awakened them further to recover the truth of His promises and warnings concerning the end times, the restoration of Israel and the imminent removal of the Church, all of which birthed a new and living impetus toward evangelism out through the doors God was opening worldwide and of seeing the lost come to salvation.

Eventually that evangelistic fervor would be swallowed up and replaced by a social gospel of good works and an ecumenical watering down of the truth of God's Word until most of the Church is now hot for their own areas of false teaching, while altogether cool and lukewarm to the Word of God and true Doctrine of the Church.

The 7 letters lay out a prophetic picture of the nearly 2000 years of the Church on Earth. That time is now about to close. The true Church is about to be removed while the false church is about to be led into the deception of the Antichrist masquerading as the returned Christ. It will be a simple matter for him to deceive them all since they have been taught there is no Rapture, no Tribulation, no Millennium and no Antichrist... the Bible says they are blinded and they will believe the lie.

Do you notice the other thing that is different about the Church of the Laodiceans? Jesus says to them, and only to them... goats and tares that are filling Churches around the World... He says, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.' The Lord Jesus Christ is ***on the outside knocking***. He has been expelled from the Church of the Laodiceans. He is speaking to 'church going' people... to TV preachers and their followers, to the many, filling pews, hearing false teaching... and yet, even in the Church of the Laodiceans there is a remnant of true believers of whom Jesus says, 'I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also 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.'

Next week, if we haven't been Raptured, we'll begin to study what begins to happen... right after the Rapture!