

The Seven Churches Part 4 – Philadelphia & Laodicea

Philadelphia

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write - In West Philadelphia born and raised - On the playground is where I spent most of my days - Chillin' out, maxin', relaxin' all cool - Shootin' some b-ball outside of the school

Revelation 3:7-13 "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": ⁸ "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 name means *brotherly love*, and this city was the youngest of the seven cities, and was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece.
- "The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces."
- This was a *prosperous* city. "Philadelphia commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to

the East. Philadelphia was the gateway from one continent to another.” (Barclay)

Jesus describes Himself

- Vs 7 - 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”
- He who is holy and true – These are not tendencies with Jesus. This is His being. Also, this is another reference to Him being God, as only Yahweh is described this way in the Old Testament.
- Holy – Set Apart, or separated to God. Holy can mean pure and morally blameless, but the truest meaning is separated to God. This is a part of our salvation. Romans states over and over we are dead (separated) to sin and alive (united) to God.
- He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens – This is a reference to Isaiah 22:20-23
- In Isaiah 22, Israel is receiving judgment for not obeying God. Shebna is the steward and he is evil. God replaces him with Eliakim as steward. The steward was given the keys to the kingdom, meaning they were the ones that chose who was allowed into the king’s presence and also was the main manager of the king’s resources.
- Key represents ownership. The Key of David shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.
- So the Kingdom is His. He opened the door to God’s presence before the church of Philadelphia and no one can shut it.
- This is an unconditional covenant made between God and David through which God promises David and Israel that the Messiah (Jesus Christ) would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. The Davidic Covenant is unconditional because God does not place any conditions of obedience upon its fulfillment. The surety of the promises made rests solely on God’s faithfulness and does not depend at all on David or Israel’s obedience.

- Shuts and no one opens... - Jesus has complete authority and power. If He opens it, it is open, etc...
- This open door specifically is to spread the Gospel. There were/are a lot of adversaries to the spread of the Gospel, but none will be able to prevent it.

What Jesus sees

- Vs. 8 - 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.
- for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.
 - A little strength does not imply weakness, rather the right amount of strength to depend on God. They have been faithful and are not ashamed of being called children of God.
 - Little strength – Dunamis – miraculous power. They do not trust in their own strength, but rather have kept faithful and humble before God.
 - Not denying His Name is more than just not denying when asked, but living in a way where it is obvious without asking if you serve Jesus.

What Jesus will do

- Vs 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.
 - These Jews are not true Jews and are persecuting the church. While Philadelphia has not succumbed to this persecution, it is still unpleasant and disruptive.
 - Jesus promises that they will come and worship before your feet – Not worship them, but rather come into agreement with them.

The church will see their enemies admit that the church was right and worship with them. They will know the love of God. The wording of know that I have loved you is because they, like Saul before becoming Paul, had a wrong idea of whom God loved.

- Vs. 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.
 - Intense persecution is coming to most of the earth, as we have seen in the letters to other churches and have seen throughout history. This church is promised protection from it.
 - Smyrna was also faithful, but they were not spared the persecution and trials. This may seem unfair. We do not know why God allows some things to happen while preventing others. Why some are spared trials, and some are not. But we do know that God is faithful to always be with us.
 - In trials, the right question is never why is this happening. There is no answer to that. The right question is what is God doing in this and how can I come into agreement with Him in what He is doing.
- Vs 11 - Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.
 - Quickly = suddenly and unexpectedly.
 - Hold fast – Remain faithful to what they have. What do they have? An open door to God's Kingdom and they are stewarding Kingdom resources.
 - The crown – Again, not a crown of royalty, but a victor's crown. This is like Paul saying in **2 Timothy 4:7-8** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

The Reward

- Vs. 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.
 - Philadelphia suffered earthquakes. Pillars in temples were designed to make the structures able to withstand anything. Jesus is saying they will be the unshakable supports of the Kingdom. Nothing will shake them, nothing will destroy them.
 - When earthquakes came, the citizens of Philadelphia had to flee into the country where no structures would collapse on them. As the trials come and things around them are shaken, they will never leave. Nothing will ever cause them to leave the presence of God.
 - They will get 3 names written on them, God's Name, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus' new Name. – In Philadelphia when someone was honored, their name and where they were from was inscribed on a pillar. Here, the person is the pillar and God is inscribing His name on them, since they have honored God and Jesus.

Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22 "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. ²² “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’ ’

- Laodicea was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population. Like other cities in the region. There was a famous temple of Asklepios in Laodicea, with a more famous medical school connected with the temple.
- After an earthquake devastated the region in a.d. 60 Laodicea refused Imperial help to rebuild the city, successfully relying on their own resources. They didn’t need outside help, they didn’t ask for it, and they didn’t want it. “Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us: ‘Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us.’” (Barclay)
- Laodicea was also a noted commercial center, and some of its goods were exported all over the world. “It is frequently noted that Laodicea prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world.” (Mounce)
- One of their problems was a poor water supply that made Laodicea vulnerable to attack through siege. If an enemy army surrounded the city, they had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off. Therefore, the leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to negotiate and compromise instead of fight.

- Their main water supply came on a six-mile aqueduct from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Because the water came from hot springs, it arrived unappetizingly lukewarm.
- The name Laodicea means “rule of the people.” This church well represents a church run by majority rule instead of God. “Its name designates it as the Church of mob rule, the democratic Church, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamour and voting.” (Seiss)
- This is reflected in Jesus’ address to the church: the church of the Laodiceans. For the other churches, it was the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1) or the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8) or the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1). But here, it is the church of the Laodiceans.

Jesus introduces Himself

- the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:
 - Amen – It is done. Jesus is the personification of the affirmation of the truth of God.
 - Faithful and True Witness – I mean, pretty self-explanatory. What Jesus has witnessed He is faithful and true with.
 - Beginning of the creation of God – Beginning is actually origin. Jesus is the origin of creation. In the beginning was the Word. This shows that all creation is His. He is the one who made it and He rules it.

What Jesus sees in Laodicea

- Vs. 15-16 - 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.

- This is not Jesus saying either be hot (on fire for God) or cold (rejecting God) just don't be apathetic. They did not use hot and cold in that context at this time.
 - Jesus is comparing them to the city water that is lukewarm.
 - Cold water is refreshing and has purpose. Hot water is great for bathing and cooking and has purpose.
 - Their works are disgusting before God. Vomit-inducing.
- Laodicea had learned to rely on themselves. They were not dependent on God, even for their spirituality and church. They could do it themselves.
- Vs 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—
 - The church at Laodicea put their trust in material things. They lost their dependency on God.
 - They could not see that they were impoverished. Spiritually they were wretched (miserable), miserable (pitied), poor (beggarly), blind (no discernment of spiritual matters), and naked (not clothed not righteous).
 - There is a stark contrast between how they are viewing themselves and how God sees them.

What Jesus wants them to do

- Vs. 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.
 - For Laodicea to change, they first had to recognize their need and spiritual poverty.

- Buy Gold refined in fire – Faith that is pure. Faith that will endure because it has been tried by fire. Faith that rejects sin and embraces holiness.
- Buy White Garments from Jesus – He clothes us in white garments – righteousness. They are trusting in their blessings to determine if they are righteous, not their faith in Jesus.
 - Shame of their nakedness – Without the righteousness of Jesus, our good works look like filthy rags. Or we are naked and do not know it.
- Anoint your eyes with eye salve – They need spiritual sight. They are blind to seeing Jesus, blind to the truth, blind to their own condition.
- How do we buy these things from Jesus? The answer is actually in the upcoming verses. It's allowing the life of Christ in us. The Laodiceans have been so consumed with their "great" lives, that they have not allowed Christ into their lives. They are acting in the name of Jesus, but only acting.
 - **Matthew 7:21-23** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² 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?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"
- Vs 19 - As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
 - Looking at the harshness that Jesus speaks to this church could leave people with the thought that Jesus does not love Laodicea. But Jesus says that the fact that He is rebuking them is evidence of His love.

- The word used here for love is Phileo – So Jesus doesn't just love them, He is their friend.
- We should be more concerned with silence than with rebuke.
- Be zealous and repent – Repentance has been a theme with most of the churches. The word for zealous is actually the word hot. Jesus is saying to stop being lukewarm, apathetic, and to come into agreement with Jesus.
- Vs 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.
 - Jesus stands and knocks. He must be invited in, but He is there, waiting patiently. And not silently. He makes His presence known.
 - We choose to hear Him. We can choose to ignore Him. This is a choice given to us.
 - We also are given the choice to open the door.
 - But when we make that choice, He is faithful to fellowship with us. He desires that intimacy with us.

To the Overcomer

- Vs 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.
 - The overcomers overcome laziness, lukewarmness, compromise.
 - They also will sit on the throne just as Jesus did. Jesus is the first of the brethren.
 - **Ephesians 2:6** and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus
 - We are given authority in Christ.

Revelation 3:22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

- What is the Spirit saying to the churches?