

BEHOLD! - I Stand at the Door and Knock

Revelation 3:14-22

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Well, today is the third of our Open Heaven sermon series looking at Revelation.

And last week, Ruth spoke wonderfully about the letter to the Church of and how Jesus places before us an open door to walk in his strength despite our weakness and our fallibility and perhaps that sense of feeling small actually he places open doors before us and then Claire and I shared in the evening last week about just some of the exciting opportunities and open doors that could be for us as a church as we head into what we're going to be calling a year of opportunity in 2027. So I do recommend if you haven't had a chance to listen to those, do catch up on our YouTube channel if you can. God is on the move and we do need to be prepared to respond and make the most of the time we have and what is happening in the world around us. There are great opportunities now, I believe, for the church to step up.

And this week we are looking at the letter to the church at Laodicea. Laodicea is the final letter written to the seven churches in the province of Asia Minor in what is now southern Turkey. But Ruth suggested last week that it can be tempting to view these letters a bit like Ofsted reports, with Jesus pointing out good things to commend but also those areas requiring improvement.

The only thing is, although you might think about that analogy, tend to write their reports and then move on, leaving the school to undertake the required changes. But Jesus doesn't do that. Actually, he doesn't walk away and let us struggle alone.

He is with us. He holds every church closely, it says in the Revelation, in the palm of his hand. And if we humbly accept his help, he does stay with us to help us improve and overcome the challenges we face.

It's fair to call him an inspector or a back-row critic, much the relief of teachers everywhere. He is, God is a loving father who both encourages and disciplines his children out of love. And that is different in many ways.

You see, the church at Philadelphia was feeling small and weak. And Jesus encouraged them to hold on and look for those opportunities he would be opening for them. And so we come from a church that viewed itself as too small and weak, to a church that thought it had it all together at Laodicea.

Laodicea was a wealthy city during the Roman period. It was a centre of textile production, banking, it was into making medicine, and it was located on major trade routes that connected it to important cities. Some of the other letters were written to places like Ephesus, and Smyrna. And the Laodiceans were self-sufficient, can-do people (I think I would have liked them). But even because even after a terrible earthquake in AD 60, the historian Tacitus wrote that they refused outside help. They wanted to get on and rebuild themselves.

But what we read here is that wealth and self-sufficiency can be a real problem for a church and for us as individuals. You see, as soon as we start relying on ourselves, it's all too easy to lose our spiritual edge. Our natural inclinations are to stay comfortable, to avoid challenging conditions, to take more and more insurance out.

You see, when we stop taking risks or just want to consolidate and make sure we keep everything together we soon actually start to regress or shrink into spiritual apathy. That is a real danger for the church. And Jesus warned the Laodiceans that they were becoming tepid in their faith.

He introduces his letter by saying this is from “the great Amen” (3:14). That’s an amazing title, taken from that passage in Isaiah.

But Jesus warned them this way:

Revelation 3:15-16

(NIVUK) ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

Eek! It’s one of those metaphors we remember, isn’t it? But it does beg the question, why would you spit out very cold water as well?

Well, it’s all to do with the water at Laodicea. Back in 2019 or so (it was just before lockdown), my son Reuben gathered all his birthday money together and he decided that it would be a great investment to spend it on a hot tub. To be fair, there was a great B&Q sale on at the time, so I sort of agreed.

We cleared some space in the garden, we blew it up, we filled it with water, and Reuben invited all his mates around for the weekend, especially while Mims and I were away. I think they had a great time. But a few days later when we returned, I went out into the garden, and something was amiss. And I found that the pool water was stinky and slimy even after two or three days. I said to Reuben, “so, how much chemical did the supply chemical did you put in the water when you sorted it out?” And he went, “what chemical?”

Oh dear. So, in the end, actually, we couldn't redeem it. We had to empty it entirely out. We had to start all over again.

Laodicea's water supply had the icy cold stream flowing down from Mount Cadmus, which is nearby in Turkey, which soon warmed up in the sunshine as it flowed towards them. Equally, there were boiling hot springs that flowed up from nearby Hierapolis, but that was channelled towards Laodicea, but that just cooled to tepid by the time it reached the city.

So, Laodicea had lots of warm water. I remember trying some so-called natural spring water when I visited Turkey on holiday some years ago. They said, "Oh, try this. It's lovely natural spring water." And as soon as I tasted it, I knew something wasn't right. It was a little bit warm, and I can tell you... never again.

It can carry hidden dangers. It can actually become toxic to our souls. We don't realize what is happening to us. Because it can veer us towards godless humanism dressed up in religious clothing.

Jesus said to the church:

Revelation 3:17-18

(NIVUK) ¹⁷ You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire...

See, when we start to put trust in ourselves or in our wealth or in our assets and resourcefulness, Jesus actually says 'that's dangerous.' We need to buy gold refined in the fire. True spiritual gold is refined in the crucible of discomfort and dependence.

Fire purifies. Fire can be uncomfortable, but it is purifying. And when we're forced to our knees to cry out to God, when we admit our need of him and we invest our time and our effort in seeking his will together, that is when we see the true riches of refined glory of God revealed. So instead of their famous medicines and eye treatment balms, Jesus told the Laodiceans to put on godly eye-salve. Instead of naked arrogance, they were to put on the white clothing of humility and purity.

So, it begs the question, what about us here at All Saints today? Are we in danger of letting arrogance and spiritual apathy breed in a lukewarm faith? Are we aware of our desperate need for Christ? to him in repentance, seeing what we're really like and we need his help. And are we willing to be dependent not only on him but also on each other? Are we willing to admit our vulnerability to each other? Because *that* grows red-hot faith.

And I think every church faces this danger at some point in its life cycle. Indeed, some commentators suggest that the letters to the seven churches are indicative of seven key challenges that every church may need to face up to at one point or another in its life. From persecution, to false teaching, to sexual sin, to dwindling resources, to losing our first love, or just descending into spiritual apathy. These are things that can be toxic to churches, and that is why Jesus wants to alert us to them and ask ourselves, are we in danger or any of those. But thankfully, Jesus does not abandon us despite this challenge. He remains ready to come in and help us to fix the situation.

Jesus says:

Revelation 3:20

(NIVUK) 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

So, Jesus isn't just like an inspector who comes in to impose judgment and walk away. He comes in forgiveness and friendship, offering solutions.

At the beginning of the summer, I had a problem at the rectory. The decking at the back of the house was completely rotten and dangerous. And one or two people were looking at me saying, 'this is dangerous.' I needed to get it sorted before the summer barbecue, in case somebody put their foot through it and sustain a nasty injury. So, I set about thinking how to remove the old rotten wood and build something more solid and long lasting instead. And so, I gave Mike Martin a call. He's the church warden up at North Stoke, and I asked him for a bit of advice. He was an engineer in the Royal Navy, and he seems to have a knack for doing a proper job on things. Mike not only offered advice from afar, but he also came round to offer help as well. And so that next weekend my boys came up and we shifted two tons of gravel we made. Mike helped us make retaining walls and level everything. Somehow, we had time to celebrate at the end of the day over a lovely meal together. Celebrating that things had got sorted in rapid time. Caroline even brought us a lovely cake to help us celebrate. It was a great day of getting things sorted. But I was so grateful to Mike that he wasn't just a critical long-distance advisor, but he came round. He said, "I will help you."

Jesus is like that. He stands knocking at the door of our hearts, not as a judgmental inspector, or an objective advisor, but as a friend, a saviour who wants to come and help us. Who enables us to get things sorted in our lives of rottenness. To get rid of past sins, to sort out things that we're carrying that hold us back. With Jesus' help, those things can be replaced and got rid of with something blessed and eternally beautiful. Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that we can be delivered from rottenness and sin. and be forgiven and end up be given something beautiful solid and eternal instead. That is the gospel that's the good news. He's not just a judgmental inspector. He is our help, our counsellor. He comes round with the will and the means to get it sorted. We only have to open the door and welcome him in.



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