

# Behold, I stand at the door and knock

Revelation 3:14-22

*Pastor Wyley Jenkins, Jr.*

As a missionary, I have knocked on a lot of doors. Most of those were closed in my face. Most never lead to salvation. But to those who were willing to listen to the gospel, it changed them. I will never forget one of those moments. My wife and I were just friends. This was in the year 2000. We had a group of college students who wanted to go out and do evangelism together. In those days, you could go to the apartment complexes and just begin knocking from door to door. Sometimes people would reject you, but most of the time, they would listen or at least let you pray for them. My wife and I were paired together. We walked up to the door and heard loud music and people talking. It was a wild party. I thought to myself, "we should not knock here", but right when I had a doubt, my wife rang the bell. They opened, and once the smoke cleared, they looked at us and stared. I asked them if I could pray for something, and they laughed at me. As they laughed, one guy became the spokesman and began to challenge me. What about other religions? What about the Bible? As I answered each question, the best way I could, they let us in slowly. Then, they turned the music down. Then, it happened. They ran out of questions and just stared at me. That is when I spoke of the love of God for them. I told them how much Jesus loved them just as they are. One 20 something girl began to softly weep. That night they opened the door of their house, and a few of them, through an imperfect sermon, came to Jesus. I learned a valuable lesson. All the stress and difficulty of ministry is worth it if a few open their hearts to Jesus. What looks impossible for us he can do when we open the door to him. What a glorious Jesus! I want to share four things we can learn from the letter.

1. Jesus wants us to turn away from materialism. (V. 15-17)
2. Jesus wants us to seek what is truly valuable. (V. 18)
3. Jesus wants us to let him into our churches and lives. (V. 19-20)
4. Jesus wants us to remember that he is our truthful, faithful creator, and their true hope. (V. 14, 21-22)

## **1. Jesus wants us to turn away from materialism**

<sup>14</sup> *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.*

*<sup>15</sup> I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."*

Here is where Jesus usually gives a commendation. It is that spiritual high five, fist bump or side hug he gave to most of the other churches. In those letters, he gave compliments. Here he has no compliment. He has a metaphor for judgment, *"I will spit you out of my mouth."* I remember hearing this metaphor of hot and cold meant that Jesus wanted us hot (passionate, active vibrant), which was a good thing, or Jesus preferred us cold (uninterested, far away from him), which was bad. He even preferred the cold over the lukewarm. These would be hypocrites, spiritually dead or dying people. That may have some truth to it, but that is almost certainly NOT what Jesus means here. Like all the other letters to the churches, Jesus is referring to a reality of the city of Laodicea. As one scholar says, *"Laodicea had two neighbors, Hierapolis and Colossae. Hierapolis had hot waters which possessed medicinal effects, while Colossae had cold water, which was also thought to be healthy. Laodicea had no good water source, however, and had to pipe it in. By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm and dirty."* (Thomas Schreiner)

In other words, the people of Laodicea would see BOTH hot and cold water as good, pleasing and useful. Lukewarm dirty water only makes a person want to spit it out. So what Jesus is saying is that your way of being is as attractive as lukewarm, dirty, bad-tasting water. What were they doing that was so wrong to merit such a metaphor? We do not have to guess, because the next line, verse 17, is the explanation.

*<sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*

How rich were they? In 60 A.D., an earthquake almost totally destroyed their town. It was so devastating that the Roman government offered to help with emergency aid. The people of Laodicea refused help of any kind. They did not need it. They were wealthy. One ancient historian calls them the Swiss bankers of their time. They had banks, wool factories, and medical facilities and pharmaceutical products that went all over the Roman world. They were rich, and so were the church people. Is Jesus angry at them for being rich? Is having money or prospering financially wrong? What was Jesus upset about?

Money is not evil in and of itself, in the same way that a gun is not an evil thing. It takes a person to pull the trigger. It takes a person to spend or love money. Money is only a piece of paper. Having a lot of money is not evil. Being a generous person has nothing to do with how much money you have. There are poor people who are very generous, and there are rich people who are generous. Their material blessings are under Christ's authority. But there are others who love money. They think that when they have money in the bank, they are safe. They feel it can buy their happiness. It took me a while after getting saved to learn to give, but anybody can learn to trust God more than money. Trusting in wealth instead of God is a curse. Finding security in wealth instead of in God is evil. Having money as your Lord and Master instead of God is idolatry. Some people can't handle wealth. It consumes them. It defines them. Prosperity without God is dangerous. In a similar way, the Christians in Laodicea THOUGHT that since they were truly materially wealthy, they did not need anything that Jesus offered. The Christians in Laodicea were complacent, comfortable, and independent and materialistic. Do any of these words describe you?

- **Complacent:** Marked by self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.
- **Comfortable:** Affording or enjoying contentment and security.
- **Independent:** Not subject to control by others, or not requiring or relying on something, or not looking to others for one's opinions for guidance in conduct, or not requiring or relying on others.
- **Materialistic:** Overly concerned or preoccupied with material possessions, rather than with intellectual or spiritual things.

Let's look at a few scriptures that relate to this subject:

Deuteronomy 6:10-12: *"And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build,<sup>11</sup> and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full,<sup>12</sup> then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."*

Proverbs 30:8-9: *"Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,<sup>9</sup> lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."*

They had forgotten God. They were saying, "Who is the LORD?" On top of that, Laodicea had many people who were deceived about who they were. They were spiritually unaware of how they looked to Jesus. So he tells them, *"you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*

They thought that they were desirable, but they were wretched. They thought they were worthy of envy, but they were pitiable. They thought they were rich, but they were poor. They thought that they knew what was happening, but they were blind. They thought they wore the finest clothes, but in the eyes of Jesus, they were poorly dressed. They did not know themselves. Are you sure that you know yourselves? How can a person know what he looks like until he looks into the mirror? Jesus' words are always like a mirror. If you truly want to know who you are, you need to know who God says you are.

## 2. Jesus wants us to seek what is truly valuable

*"<sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."*

As I said, Laodicea was a banking hub and was therefore known for being wealthy. Many people had gold. They also were famous for a certain breed of sheep that produced black wool. As it was very fine and unique, it brought a lot of profit to the people. They were also famous for an eye ointment that they produced there that was said to heal many eye problems. In all three examples, Jesus says, "I have something better." Their gold was good, but his gold has been refined by fire. They lived for earthly gold that is here today and gone tomorrow. Jesus' refined gold is a symbol of the wealth in

Jesus that never fades. People were easily tricked in ancient times. Gold was mixed with other substances. Jesus says his gold is not their gold. It is pure.

Adolf Merkle committed suicide because of losing a large amount of money in 2009. It is a sad story. He was 74 years old and jumped in front of a train. I am not sure what he was thinking. It was estimated that his wealth was worth 9 billion euros at the time of his death. People want to die when they lose the person or thing they love the most. When we lose our romantic relationship, our status, our loved one, or our financial security, we might lose our greatest love. When we invest so much and lose it all, it seems like we were deceived. Timothy Keller is a great speaker and Pastor. I have read many of his books. He was recently diagnosed with cancer, and it seems quite complicated. He wrote this on his twitter feed: *"When Jesus is all you have left, you realize Jesus is what you ultimately need."*

Let me ask you some questions. What is true wealth? Is it counted with 0's behind it? What is true beauty? Is it on the outside of a person? Whose love is the greatest and most important in your life? What do you hope in? Jesus says his wealth is true wealth. He says that his clothes are the brand you need to be beautiful, because they make you righteous. He says his spiritual medicine will cure your spiritual blindness. Jesus is the true soul doctor.

### 3. Jesus wants us to let him into our churches and lives

What does it mean to be loved by Jesus? We write songs about the beauty and peace of God's love. We paint pictures of God's love that are landscapes, or maybe it is Jesus holding a lamb. I used to have a tapestry of Jesus, helping two children over a river. I loved it. It always reminded me that the love of God is beyond words. I am one of those children Jesus is helping to cross the river. I stray. At times I get caught up in the current. Sometimes I do not listen to him. Did you know that he tells me to come to him because he loves me? It is his love. It corrects me. It disciplines me. It calls me to come back to him.

***"<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me."***

Some of you are on the wrong side of the river, but Jesus is coming. He will cross any river. He will go anywhere to get his sheep. He is the good shepherd. Sometimes we don't want to come to him. We are like the church at Laodicea. Jesus is knocking on the door. *"Open up and let me in"*, he says. Over the quarantine, I got to know a man that had come to our church a couple of times. Dani, our dear brother and usher, invited him. He decided to let Jesus into his life. He has repented and given his heart and life to Christ. He has come out of a hard circumstance, but now Jesus is carrying him over the rocks. He wants to get baptized.

What about you? Will you open up? We fear that if we open up our lives, we will lose control. We might lose our money. We will lose our sins that we love. We might even be afraid that we will lose our friends or our romantic other. Fear is always about what we will lose. Fear is a liar. Stop thinking about what you will lose and start dreaming about all that you will gain! Dream about all your life could be if Jesus were really everything. Could you imagine Jesus coming and eating with you? Having a meal is all about getting together. It is about knowing a person. Open up the door, and

Jesus will come in and eat with you. Where Jesus is, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is peace. Let him into your marriage. Let him into your circle of friends. Let him into your future. Let him into your life. Maybe today, over a computer, cell phone, or tv screen, you need to let Jesus in. You need him. Don't be poor, pitiable, blind, and naked. Come to Jesus, and he will provide all that you need.

#### 4. Jesus wants us to remember that he is our truthful, faithful creator, and their true hope

I want you to see how these problems are solved by knowing Jesus and believing in him.

<sup>14</sup> *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation."*

There are two important pieces of information to remember about Jesus from these words. First, he is always truthful. If he says something about us, it is true. Here he reminds the believers in Laodicea that he is truthful. If someone has a harsh word to say about us, the first reaction many of us will have is to argue and deny the truth. Jesus reminds them that what he says about them is the truth, and fighting with it will only hurt them. This is the case with all of God's words. It does no good to argue with God. Reality is what the maker says, it is. Truth is the only way he sees it. This is a big difference between Jesus and the Devil. The Devil is a liar and the father of all lies. Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true witness. Even the best Christians tell lies at times, but it should not be a habit. I have told lies. You have told lies, but Jesus is always truthful. We are called to be like Jesus and be faithful and truthful in everything, and trust the results to God.

So, the first piece of information to remember about Jesus is that he is faithful and true. He does not close his eyes to our sins. He does not ignore the truth. The second piece of information to remember about Jesus is that he is *"the beginning of God's creation"*. What does that mean? The Jehovah's witnesses cult tells us that this means that Jesus was the first created being of God. That does not make any sense in the book of Revelation, where Jesus is constantly called divine and compared to God. Just listen to the first 2 sermons in this series for a brief understanding of this. There is also this statement at the end of the book. Revelation 22:13, 12, says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."* *"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."* The God of the Old Testament, who calls himself the beginning and the end (Isaiah 41:4, 43:10, 44:6), is Jesus who is coming.

So here is what I think "the beginning of God's creation" means. First, it might mean that Jesus is the creator. The word used as beginning can also mean beginner. That is what it means in Isaiah and earlier in Revelation when God says he is the beginning. If this is the case, Jesus is reminding the people that he is their creator. He makes no mistakes. As you can see, most of their issues stem from believing they can be independent of God. Jesus reminds them that they were created by him and need him. The second thing it could mean is that Jesus is the beginning of the new creation. God has promised that just as Jesus died and rose from the grave, so will everyone who believes in him. Not only that the world will be burned with fire and will be created new. All of this will happen because of Jesus's resurrection. So, if Jesus is referring to himself as the beginning of the new creation, what he is telling them is all of the earthly things they live for do not matter. The people in Laodicea

needed to remember that this world will end. Jesus began a new creation that will never end, so why would you give your heart to wealth and status that is only a vapor? That is why Jesus reminds them. We need to remember the same. God does not lie. His word does not lie. He is not a liar. When he speaks about us or anything else, he is always right. His future is our future. He is the only hope. He make this extravagant promise in the last two verses.

*“<sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

If history is clear about anything, it is that thrones come and go. Kings come and go. CEOs come and go. Pastors come and go. But never forget that the throne of Jesus is forever. Let's be conquerors, so that we can sit with Jesus ruling. This is a metaphor for eternal glory with Jesus. Fame, beauty and wealth make us great for a short time on earth. But Conquering with Jesus will make us great forever. No eye has seen, and no ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him.

#### Questions for reflection:

1. What does it mean that the church at Laodicea was neither hot nor cold?
2. What might it mean that he would spit them out?
3. What was the issue Jesus had with them in verse 17?
4. Which word, of these four, best describes you? Complacent? Comfortable? Independent? Materialistic? How might that be dangerous for you spiritually?
5. How is verse 18 helpful for understanding that Jesus is always better than the world?
6. What keeps people and churches from letting Jesus in?