

wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—(RV 3.17) They were lukewarm—spoiled. They thought so highly of themselves that they weren’t good for anything. They were useless—when they should, instead, have **been useable**: but to do that, they needed to be humble.

EX: They thought themselves so wealthy and powerful—they were in the wealthy Laodicea, after all! They had money and opportunity to spare! But rather than investing in the city and its gold, its clothing, and its medicine, they should instead investing in Christ: *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.* (RV 3.18)

AP: The terrifying thing about Laodicea is the realization that, more than any other of the churches, I’ve seen its spirit reflected in the modern American church. For we are *rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—what need do we have of Christ when we can do it all ourselves?*

LK 18.10-12 ~ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

There are so many Pharisees—so many Laodiceans in the American church! And Christ reveals He’s sick from them—wanting to vomit them out of His mouth. **For what good are they? How much good can a man do who believes he’s as good as he needs to be? Why ever would He seek anything when he thinks he has all he’d ever need?**

LK 18.13-14 ~ *And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

That kind of man, though: that’s a person who can be of use. That’s the kind of person who will admit their own weaknesses and sins and failings. That’s the power of humility: being willing to open the door—to let Him in.

RV 3.19-22 ~ *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.” ’*

CONCLUSION

Christ wanted the church in Asia Minor to understand their weaknesses: He wanted them to understand what was coming, and specifically, the kind of church that they ought to be. Like **Sardis**, we need to **be watchful**—examining ourselves and not being content with our old victories. Like Philadelphia, we need to **be evangelistic**—turning our enemies into our allies in Christ. And like **Laodicea**, we need to **be useable**—aware of wretchedness and poverty, and our need for Christ.

The message that was written to these churches in their unique situations are still true today: and the lessons they teach are still valid today! Let us learn from them—let us strive to **be watchful, be evangelistic, and be useable**—“*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

INVITATION

#678 [Exp-NTP]
10/30/2025

A Whirlwind Tour – Pt 2

PC ___ Pchd _____

RV 3 (NKJV)

QUESTION: What lessons can we learn from the 7 churches of Asia Minor?

TRN TO RV 3

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began our look at the letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor recorded in **RV 2-3**. We started a “**whirlwind tour**” of the church of the 1st Century. In a book that is filled with symbolic language and difficult imagery, the letters are “**refreshingly normal**”: letters written to 7 of churches in Asia Minor.

BACKGROUND

Each of these letters was written to a real group of Christians—each from different backgrounds, facing different circumstances. But while the letters were written to these Christian churches, they were written for us all: *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.* (RV 1.3)

Each of these congregations stands, today, as an example to us: an example of what Christ wanted to see from His church. Last week, we took a look at the first group of 4 churches from **RV 2**: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira. And each of these churches stood as an example of another area of strength or weakness—something that we must strive towards.

In **Ephesus**, we saw a church who struggled with **remembering their first love**. In **Smyrna**, we saw one who needed to be **prepared for suffering**. In **Pergamum**, we saw a church struggling with **standing for truth**. And in **Thyatira**, we saw a small church being encouraged to be **devoted to holiness**. Tonight, as we look to **RV 3**, we see the final three churches: all three of which encourage us to “**be**” something.

Like the four before them, these three letters each follow a simple pattern: each are written “*to the angel of the church*” and each close with the same call: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” It’s the section in the middle where we find the thrust of the letter. It’s there that we see what it is that we ought to “**be**”.

1PT 2.9-10 ~ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

We are nearing 2000 years since these words were originally written, halfway around the globe from us. And yet their message resonates. We have been chosen as God’s special people. And if we want to be those people, we need to pattern ourselves after the pattern that God sketched out for His church, all those years ago. As each of these letters ends, we echo: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” ’ (RV 1.29)

BD1: Sardis: Be Watchful (RV 3.1-6)

The city of Sardis had once been a boisterous city. But it wasn’t anymore. It was one of the oldest cities in Asia and stood at the intersection of three coastal cities and major interior roads. This resulted in its rise as a political and financial powerhouse. It was the capital of an ancient kingdom in 560 BC, under the last king of Lydia, Croesus. A wealthy city due to river that had been filled with gold-bearing sand, it was the origin of a common phrase at the time: “As rich as Croesus”. Croesus took his wealth and power seriously. He instituted some of the first known government coinage: our modern currency has its root in Sardis.

The city’s wealth and power led to overconfidence: built atop of spur of Mount Tmolus, the city seemed impregnable. However, their overconfidence resulted in their downfall when, on two separate occasions, a watchful opposing force discovered that they could climb up one section of the mountain and, therefore, conquer the city.

RV 3.1 ~ “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.

EX: The church in Sardis had taken on the characteristics of its city: they’d taken pride in their past accomplishments: their old faith and their old works. And they thought that was good enough! They thought they stood, impregnable, unable to fall. Like the city in which they dwelled, they were horribly wrong! They needed to **be watchful**!

RV 3.2-3a ~ *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.* ³ *Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.*

EX: They needed to look at themselves: examine themselves. They needed to ensure that they didn’t just live in the past, but rather, **be watchful** in the present. *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. (3b)* Just as the invaders snuck in while the people of Sardis weren’t watching, God would come when these unfaithful didn’t expect Him. And so, they needed to **be watchful**! *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. (1CR 16.13)*

AP: Thankfully, they weren’t all of them lost: *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. (4)* The difference was that these had remained pure: uncorrupted by Sardis and the other wicked around them. They had lived up to their name. And God calls for us to do the same, today. To not run on the fumes of years ago, but to live, daily, in the name of Christ—uncorrupted by the world around us. And if we do, we will be one who “overcomes”!

RV 3.5-6 ~ *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.* ⁶ *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

BD2: Philadelphia: Be Evangelistic (RV 3.7-13)

In our final two cities, we see two churches different as night from day. The first was Philadelphia: located south-southeast of Sardis, it was not as large as some of the other cities. But its name was well chosen. Named after the king of Pergamum, Attalus II

“Philadelphus”. Attalus earned the title for his loyalty to his older brother—the combination of two Greek words: *φιλία* and *ἀδελφός*—roughly translated as **“Brotherly Love”**.

Unfortunately, there was another thing that the city was better known for: it had been built on a fault line, and it had been destroyed earlier that century in a terrible earthquake. Years later, the citizens of the city remained fearful of another earthquake to come, shaking the city’s foundations to the ground. But, in Christ, there was a foundation and authority that could not be shaken: *“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”: (RV 3.7)*

RV 3.8 ~ *“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.* Note that phrase: “a little strength”. That wasn’t an insult: it seems, rather, to be an acknowledgement that they were a smaller church in number, but not in faith. And God had placed an open door for them: and with it, a mission: to **be evangelistic**. He’d given them an open door: and that open door was in the last place they would have expected.

Last week, we saw the reference in Smyrna to *“the synagogue of Satan”*—who were opposing and persecuting the church there. Interestingly, that same group appears in Philadelphia: but notice something seems a bit different!

RV 3.9-13 ~ *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.

EX: Who was the open door? And why would the church in Philadelphia not be persecuted in the same way as Smyrna? It appears that the answer could be one and the same: the church in Philadelphia had an opportunity to convert their Jewish opposition, and from that conversion, would come an escape from the persecution that would befall Smyrna!

RV 3.11-13 ~ *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.”*

AP: The city of Philadelphia lived constant fear of collapse and earthquake. But should the church remain strong: holding fast to their faith, they wouldn’t have to fear collapse. Rather, they’d stand as a permanent pillar in the stable city of the church of God. The same is true for us. By **being evangelistic**, we can make the enemy our ally—the unstable, stable!

IS 11.6-10 ~ *“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.”*

BD3: Laodicea: Be Useable (RV 3.14-20)

I wish we could end on Philadelphia. I prefer to end on a positive note! But God had another plan in mind.

RV 3.14 ~ *“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:*

43 miles southeast of Philadelphia, lie the ruins of a city: its ruins sticking out of the ground like tombstones. Best our records can tell, its citizens were wealthy: its strategic position astride the most important highway to the East made it a financial hotspot and banking center. In a way, it was like an ancient New York City—known for its banks, its medical centers, and fine clothing. Its citizens had it made and were lacking in nothing—they felt comfortable and content, having placed their trust fully in their physical blessings. And it’s for that reason that Jesus describes Himself, conversely, as the one in whom they should trust!

Jesus begins using a phrase that, previously, had been used to comfort when spoken to the other churches: *“I know your works, (RV 3.15a)* But while a comforting phrase to the rest of the churches, it was a phrase of indictment to Laodicea: for they were *neither cold nor hot. (RV 3.15b)*. Oddly, Christ then states, *“I could wish you were cold or hot.” (RV 3.15b)*

What did that mean?

Some think it meant being spiritually **“cold”** (unbelieving) or spiritually **“hot”** (on fire for God). But that puts God as preferring a person being unbelieving than undecided or uncommitted. That seems strange. More likely, this was a reference to two springs of water: the cold, refreshing, waters of Colossae and the hot spring waters of Hierapolis. Both had a purpose: but when they met in Laodicea, they were lukewarm: not good for anything.

RV 3.16 ~ *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. How are they lukewarm? Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become*