

## Revelation Chapter 3- John Karmelich

1. My title for Chapter 3 is “all or nothing”. I’ll explain all of that or none of it in a moment. ☺
  - a) This lesson concludes the “seven letters to the seven churches”. Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation are Jesus dictating seven letters to seven specific churches that existed in the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD. They are a “report card” of what each of those churches are doing right and wrong. Each letter ends with a statement saying in effect that all Christians need to understand what Jesus is saying to each church. The main point of the letters is Jesus will judge all Christians the same way He is judging these seven churches.
  - b) The next thing to remember is that the issue at hand is one’s effectiveness as a Christian. There are salvation references here and there, but the primary issue is how one can make a difference for Jesus. Our primary purpose as Christians is to be effective witnesses.
  - c) This leads us to Chapter 3: There are three letters left. Here’s a key point: In each of the three final letters, Jesus either says nothing good or nothing bad about each church. That is one reason why I call this lesson “all or nothing”. Jesus has nothing good to say to two of these three churches and all good things to say to one of these three churches.
2. One of the themes I am going to develop in this lesson is the concept that Jesus’ standards for us as Christians is an “all or nothing” attitude. If Jesus is the Lord of our lives, that means He desires to be in charge of our lives 100% of the time. Jesus wants our “all”.
  - a) It doesn’t mean Jesus wants us in church and prayer every moment of every day. It means that we are to live every moment of our lives with the understanding we are accountable to God in all that we do. The same attitude we have when we go to church should be the same attitude we have every day. The term “disciple” has the same root word as “discipline”. God desires we change our lifestyle in conformance with His will. At the same time, we pray and realize our full dependence upon God to live this lifestyle.
  - b) The best bible verses on the “purpose for Christian living” can be found here:
    - i) Paul wrote, “It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ (Christians) may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV, words in parenthesis added).
    - ii) Paul is saying all Christians have some gifts. Some are called to be leaders, but all are called for “works of service” so the body of Christ may be built up. That means it is the goal of every Christian to help other Christians mature and grow in their faith in Christ. Bringing in new Christians is part of that mission statement. It is designed to be a team effort, which is why we get together in church groups.
  - c) This leads back to the purpose of the seven letters to the seven churches. It is about Jesus giving a status report to show our effectiveness in building up the Body of Christ. The Lord Jesus wants each of us to be effective Christians. He wants effective churches. The punishment for not being an effective church is Jesus has the power and the will to “end” whatever church is not being effective.
    - i) One thing to grasp from these letters is that Jesus is in charge of all churches. It is through His will that individual churches are born and He also has the power to bring them to an end. Jesus works through human effort to build up a church and He continually judges our performance as to its effectiveness.
    - d) Therefore, if a church is not “all” effective, it can, and does get reduced to “nothing”.
    - e) With that said, I’m purposely going to stop the introduction here and get started on the three letters themselves. We have a lot of ground to cover today. Let’s start with the 5<sup>th</sup> of the seven letters, which is the letter to the church in Sardis.

3. Chapter 3, Verse 1: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:
  - a) Each letter is addressed to the "angel" of that church. The word angel means messenger. One can interpret this as meaning each letter is addressed to the person delivering the message. The second possibility is that there is a specific angelic being overseeing each individual church. Either way, the idea is that this church in Sardis gets this message.
  - b) Sardis was an ancient city with a great historical reputation, but that reputation was going downhill by the time of this letter. Sardis is one of those places where everyone brags about its past, but people don't say much about its present history.
  - c) The origin of the word "Sardis" is debated. Some say it means "prince of joy". Other say it means "escaping ones" or "those who came out". (John Macarthur). This latter definition may be in play here as Jesus will describe this church as a dead church, but at the same time there is a remnant group of believers who "escape" to salvation.
  - d) Sardis is built up on a hillside and was difficult to conquer. Despite that, there are two recorded times in history where the city was conquered. One was by the Persians in 549 BC and one was by the Greeks in 218 BC. Both times the army snuck up the high, narrow back ridge. That historical fact will become a "pun" as Jesus describes himself as a "thief" who will sneak into this city, just as these armies snuck up the back, high walls.
4. Verse 1, Second Sentence: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.
  - a) Back in Chapter 1 of Revelation, we had references to the "seven spirits of God" and the "seven stars". Let's take on the easy one first: The stars represent the angels of the seven churches. This was bluntly stated in Chapter 1, Verse 20. I believe the word picture is that a star is a "background light" in the same way angels work in the background to accomplish God's will.
  - b) The "seven spirits" is another word-picture. It does not mean the Holy Spirit is broken up into seven parts. The number seven in the bible is associated with "completeness". Just as God rested on the seventh day from his "perfect" creation, so seven represents completeness. Among the functions of the Holy Spirit is "complete" in bringing in all people who will be saved through Christ as well as helping to mature them.
  - c) Putting these two titles together, the idea is that "Jesus is in charge". He is in charge of all the angels of the seven churches. Somehow, Jesus is in charge of the Holy Spirit's role in making churches effective witnesses for Him.
  - d) Now comes the tough part of Verse 1: "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." This is not good. ☹️
    - i) First of all, notice this is not the end of the letter to Sardis. Jesus does not say, "You are dead. Too bad. I'm moving on to the next letter. Have a nice day." ☺️
    - ii) There are still more verses to go about Sardis, including a mention of those who are still loyal followers of Jesus.
    - iii) Remember the point of the letters is not about eternal condemnation, but about being effective witnesses for Jesus. The Lord Jesus is saying in effect that the effectiveness of this church is dead, even though they still have a sign on the door claiming to be a Christian church.
  - e) Going back to the history of this town, remember that Sardis is one of those places known for its glorious past, but the town is known for its history, not its present success. That is a "pun" here in that Jesus is giving the church of Sardis has a similar reputation.
  - f) OK, onto the tough question: What is a "dead church"? It's easy to say that the church is non-effective, but what does that really mean?
    - i) First of all, a dead church is not one that is struck by a lightening bolt and is now a heap of ashes. When Jesus talks about a "church", He is always talking about the people within the church, not the real estate and the building structures.

- ii) In my professional life, I have visited many “dead” churches. I’ve seen church buildings sold to others as the members can no longer financially support it. I’ve seen churches merge with other churches as they don’t have enough members to keep it running. I’ve seen big glorious old church buildings with a handful of people coming there every Sunday. I’ve seen pastors blame demographic changes to their neighborhood for their lack of membership. A “dead” church usually has a handful of seniors who have been meeting there for years, and don’t want to change their habits. Dead churches are usually proud of their past heritage, but their present circumstances have little to nothing to brag about.
  - iii) Let me state that that “numbers” have nothing to do with whether or not a church is an effective church. Jesus commends some of these seven churches and I doubt they were large in size. First century Christians often met in people’s homes.
  - iv) An effective church is one where the church is making a difference to its members in that people are growing in their faith in Christ. That same church is making a difference in the community and leading others to Christ. An effective church is one that is being lead by the Holy Spirit as opposed to trying to control the Holy Spirit. An effective church is true to God’s word and not their own programs.
  - v) Here’s another sign of an effective church: They are getting spiritual resistance. One thing you will notice about the church in Sardis is there is no reference to persecution or false teachers. Why should Satan waste his resources on a dead church? If nobody in a community is complaining about those holier-than-thou Christians in your church, ☺ or if there is no group attempting to bring false doctrines into your church (not everyday, but once in awhile), this is a sign that your church may be “dead” as far as Jesus is concerned.
  - vi) As I’ve stated in other lessons, “If you don’t believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile”. If there is no spiritual opposition, it is a sign that one’s church is not being effective. This does not mean one has to be paranoid about spiritual resistance, but one should expect it if one is going to be an effective witness.
  - g) Gee, on that somber note, what do you say we move on to the second verse? ☺
5. Verse 2: Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.
- a) The term “wake up” is a paraphrase, but it is a good one at that!
  - b) In Verse 1, Jesus calls this church “dead”, but notice Jesus is not giving up on it. I am 100% convinced that Jesus never, ever gives up on those who are His. God loves us too much to ever leave us alone. One thing you get from reading through the Old Testament over and over again is God never stops trying to get the Israelites to turn back to Him no matter how many times they mess up. God has the same attitude with believers.
  - c) Here is this church that Jesus said was “dead”. At the same time, Jesus tells that same church to “wake up” as if it is in a deep sleep.
  - d) Let me paraphrase what Jesus is saying to this church: “Look, your church is a “dead men walking” and I mean it. Before I officially close your church door for good, understand that you are still My witness to the world around you. Your church may be a dead asset, but you are still My asset. I’m writing you to give you one more chance to get your act together. What I as Your Lord require of you is to be effective witnesses for Me. If you fail to do so, I’ll shut you down and look for others. I won’t tell you the day and I won’t tell you the hour, but I guarantee that if you don’t shape up, I’ll shut you down officially.”
  - i) These are the churches that are sold for land value. These are the churches that “merge” with other churches in order to survive. That is how, in our times, Jesus “comes like a thief” to shut down such churches.

- e) Let's talk about the "ray of hope" for such a church. Jesus says to "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent."
- i) When one declares one's allegiance to Christ, one first understands that we are sinful people and are relying upon Jesus shed blood for the forgiveness of sin. With that understanding of forgiveness comes a sense of peace and joy. It doesn't mean our life is perfect and prosperous from that point onward. It means we can have a sense of peace and joy no matter what life throws at us knowing we are forgiven and knowing we will live forever with Jesus in heaven.
  - ii) Because we are imperfect people, God wants us to work in "teams" to support each other, help each other, put other's lives as priority over our own and make a difference for Jesus. That is what being an effective witness for Jesus is about.
  - iii) A dead church is one where people know they are saved, but don't do much about it. They go to church out of force of habit. They sing some songs, say hello to their friends and ask each other how life was over the last week. They then go home and not think about church very much until next Sunday rolls around. There is no impact being made neither on their lives nor on the lives of people around them. Dead Christians keep to themselves and they don't do any harm to anyone.
  - iv) My title for this lesson is "all or nothing". A point of that title is that if one is not giving their all, effectively, they are giving "nothing". If one is not making a difference for Jesus in their lives, as far as Jesus is concerned, one is doing nothing.
  - v) The final call to this dead-but-still-alive church is to repent. That means to change one's way of living. If they don't, Jesus will do a "mercy-killing" on this church.
6. Verse 4: Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.
- a) What Jesus is saying is that there are saved people in this church. I have seen many a Christian do their utmost to keep a dead church alive. I've seen small choirs try to sincerely inspire the church praise God with all their hearts. I've watched pastors and people pour their heart out and make every effort they can to save "dead" churches.
  - b) Jesus is saying here that He notices such people and is reassuring them of their salvation.
  - c) This verse has a number of word pictures of "purity". Imagine a pure white garment with a big black stain on it. That stain would draw our attention. The image here is that a Christian has no such stains. It is not that we are perfect, but perfectly forgiven. Even if a Christian is wasting their time trying to revive what God wants to die, Jesus is assuring that believer that one is saved for eternity.
7. Verse 5: He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.
- a) Notice the words "like them". Verse 4 was addressed to the sincere believer in these dead churches. Verse 5 is addressed to anyone else who hasn't made a decision for Christ.
  - b) Verse 5 says he (any person) who "overcomes" will be "like them", and dressed in white.
  - c) My main theme of the seven letters is about church effectiveness, but every now and then the issue of salvation does come up. If a church is dead, there are not many saved people.
  - d) A point of Verse 4 is to reassure the saved believer in a dead-church that they still have their salvation despite the fact the church is dead. A point of Verse 5 is that it is not too late to receive salvation just because the church itself is dead.
  - e) Let's talk about the "book of life". It appears that God has a "book" with the names of every person who has ever lived. The bible uses the term "book" as that is what most people through history could comprehend. If the bible was written today, God would have said He has a computerized list of names. ☺ The text says when a person is not saved, that their name is "blotted out" of that book. The idea is that everyone has the opportunity for salvation, and is judged based on what information one has about God.

- f) Some people argue, based on this verse that a Christians can lose their salvation. I disagree with that view, but that's another debate. The point here is God is reassuring nonbelievers that just because a church is dead, does not mean it is too late to accept Christ for one's salvation.
8. Verse 6: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- a) Verse 6 is repeated in or at the end each letter. As I've mentioned in previous lessons, notice the word "churches" is plural. Jesus is saying in effect that the standards used to judge Sardis is the same standards used to judge all churches.
  - b) Let me end this section with the question of, "If I'm in a dead church, what do I do?"
    - i) The simple answer is God wants you and me to be an effective witness for Him. God will hold us accountable for what spiritual gifts He gives us. He will also hold us accountable as a church-group based on what church-group we belong to.
    - ii) A good prayer here might be "Lord, if you want me to move somewhere else, give me the boldness to go where You want me to go, or make it obvious if You want me to stay. If you want me to stay, help me to stay effective for You."
    - iii) Ponder sometime if your church is being effective. Ask if you and I individually are making a difference for Christ in this church. Think about the good and bad things said about all seven churches and ask yourself, "Is my church on the right or wrong path?" Know that there is no perfect church. We are imperfect people and all churches make mistakes. Still, one should objectively look at whatever church one belongs to and ask is it being effective. Is the church in a comfortable rut, or is it getting spiritual resistance? Is the church making an impact for Christ?
9. Verse 7: "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:
- a) First of all, this is not Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The modern American city was named after this church letter. This is the one letter that is "all good", which is why the modern city picked this name. This Philadelphia is in Asia Minor (part of modern Turkey today).
  - b) As many Americans know, the term Philadelphia means "brotherly love". We'll come back to that term in a moment.
  - c) The original city of Philadelphia was designed as a Greek outpost. It was built along a main traveling route and on the outskirts of the Greek Empire. Because it was on a main highway, the city of Philadelphia was designed to be a witness for Greek culture and Greek lifestyle. Greeks believed their culture far surpassed any others in history. In many ways they were right. Philadelphia was designed to be on the outskirts of Greek civilization as a witness to non-Greeks to the benefit of this style of living.
    - i) This "witness output" is a pun in that Jesus will say Philadelphia is an opportunity for evangelistic opportunity, given its location.
10. Verse 7, Second Sentence: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.
- a) Remember that ever one of the seven letters starts with a word-picture of Jesus. The meanings of these word-pictures are a key point to understanding the letters themselves.
  - b) Let's start with "holy". In this context, it represents God's perfection. It is the idea that everything Jesus is, does, was, will be, etc. is perfectly God-like with no faults.
  - c) The word "true", as it is used here, is the opposite of a lie. It is to say that Jesus is real, Jesus is God and Jesus is God who became man and died for our sins and rose again.
  - d) The term "key of David" is a little more complicated. A person who has a key is a person with the authority and power to lock or unlock something. If I'm the only person who has the key to my house, I'm the only person with both the authority and power to lock and unlock the house, assuming there are no broken windows anywhere. ☺
    - i) The promise of a Messiah (which means king) would rule over the entire earth was first specifically given to King David in Second Samuel Chapter 7. Jesus is saying here He has the "authority and power" as that king promised to David.

- e) From "key of David" to the end of the verse is a quote from Isaiah 22:22. In direct context, it was about a specific Israelite king's servant named Eliakim who was the "chief security officer" of the king's palace. Eliakim was in charge of protecting the king. It is also a messianic prophecy to describe how Jesus will be in charge of all things.
  - f) Now notice the last sentence: What he (Jesus) opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. This is another reference to Jesus having all authority and all power as the promised Messiah, as specifically promised to King David.
  - g) OK, John, I get the reference to authority and power. What's your point? ☺
    - i) The church of Philadelphia is an effective church. I stated in the last lesson that every church is clueless about their key issue. The last church, Sardis, was clueless they were a dead church. Philadelphia is clueless they are effective. The power of that effectiveness comes from Jesus' authority. In other words, the success of Philadelphia did not come from its own great ability, but from God's power through Jesus to be an effective witness.
11. Verse 8: I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name
- a) I titled this lesson "all or nothing" because each of the churches described in this chapter have all good things or all bad things said about it. Philadelphia is the all-good church.
  - b) In Verses 8 and 10, we have the specific compliments. Since the important goal of the seven letters is to make all Christians more effective witnesses, I thought it best to look at all the compliments paid and see how we can apply them to our lives. Jesus starts with, "I know your deeds". The first thing Jesus wants this church to know is that He is very much aware of all the good things they are doing in His name. The rest of Verse 8 and Verse 10 expands on what Jesus meant by "deeds".
  - c) Jesus then says, "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." First, remember that the title Jesus uses of himself in Verse 7 is that He alone has the keys to the door and He alone has the authority of who goes in and out.
    - i) So what does the door mean? It is a reference to salvation. It is the door to heaven. We think of a door as leading to a house. That is God's house.
  - d) So what is the "open door" placed before the Church of Philadelphia?
    - i) For starters, it refers to their salvation. Jesus is saying to them in effect, "I am proud of you. I am proud of the fact you did not deny Me despite the persecution all around you (coming up in Verse 9). You have endured. Your eternal reward awaits you and nothing can stop it!"
    - ii) If I had to say the one thing Christians most want to know in their lives is some sort of assurance that we are doing the right thing. All believers, no matter how committed go through periods of doubts, not so much about God, but about whether or not their lives are making a difference for God. Prior to Jesus describing the specifics of the good deeds of the Philadelphia church, He is reassuring them of their salvation.
    - iii) Here is another interpretation of "open door": Jesus is saying this church has a "witnessing opportunity". Remember Philadelphia was built on the outskirts of the Greek Empire and was set up as a witness to Greek culture. There is a "pun" in that knowledge as Jesus is saying this church is so effective, it is a great witnessing opportunity for Him as travelers stop in this town.
      - a) If this second view is correct, and many believe it is, then notice He is telling this church in effect, "I don't want you to rest on your past accomplishments. You are doing well, and now, I have a new opportunity for you." That's the way God works in our lives. He draws us to "this point" (now) in our lives and then prepares us for the next step.

- e) The next compliment is "You have (a) little strength".
    - i) I call this phrase, "God uses what we've got for His glory". Let's pretend this church in Philadelphia was huge, rich and powerful. The tendency of such a church would then be to give credit to themselves, and not God. I have found God works best in situations where He gets the glory. When we are willing and submissive to His will, is when God can do His best work. At the same time, God works through us. Never, ever, underestimate what God can do through us, just based on the little strength we have!
  - f) Jesus then says, "Yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."
    - i) In the last lesson, the theme was compromise with one's faith. Satan's two tried and true methods to get us to be ineffective witnesses are either by persecution or by compromise. The church of Philadelphia overcome both of these tests. Jesus is complimenting them on that fact. Don't take this compliment lightly; the church before it (Sardis) and after it (Laodicea) couldn't do it.
12. Verse 9: I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.
- a) Back in Chapter 2, the church of Smyrna dealt heavily with persecution. Part of the persecution came from the Jewish population of Smyrna. It is a sin to make false accusations against anyone (See Lev. 19:16). Calling the Jewish persecutors in Smyrna a "synagogue of Satan" is not to denounce all Jewish people, just the specific ones sinning.
    - i) If a group of Christians were killing "In Jesus name", they would be denounced by most or all Christians as a "church of Satan". It is the same idea as being stated to the specific Jewish synagogue in Smyrna and Philadelphia.
  - b) A sign of an effective church is that it is being attacked. Again, Satan doesn't waste his resources on dead churches. The previous church (Sardis) and the next church (Laodicea) have no mention of persecution. That's a sign of a dead church.
    - i) This does not mean one has to be paranoid about persecution, but simply to expect some spiritual resistance if one is being an effective witness.
  - c) Jesus then says, "I will make them (Jews who persecuted you) come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I (Jesus) have loved you (the church)".
    - i) When it says "fall down at your feet", this has nothing to do with smelling our feet. Jesus will not let us retaliate on our enemies with that horrible punishment. ☺
    - ii) This connects to the idea that everyone will bow to Jesus one day, whether by free will or by force. This is quoted in Isaiah 45:23 and Romans 14:11.
    - iii) Revelation 20:6 says we as Christians shall rule and reign with Jesus. Therefore, somehow, when those who persecuted Jesus are forced to bow, somehow they will be near our feet. That'll show them! ☺ All joking aside, one has to imagine being tortured and killed simply for being a Christian. This is Jesus' reassurance that we don't have to take revenge as God will do that for us!
  - d) Jesus next statement is, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently".
    - i) When did Jesus give us that command? The answer is, "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22, NKJV) Jesus was predicting how the church will be persecuted. In that speech, the word "endure" is given as a commandment.
    - ii) The church of Philadelphia was commended for their ability to not deny Jesus under the threat of persecution.
    - iii) Does this mean if I am too shy to say something about my faith in Jesus I can lose my salvation? No. We all have our moments when the desire to be liked is greater than our faith. The test is, when push comes to shove and it "really counts", are we going to deny Jesus or accept Him as payment for salvation?

13. Verse 10: Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.
- a) In Verse 10, there is a “special reward” for those in Philadelphia: They are kept from (some) hour of trial that will come upon the whole world. This is a classical Christian debate verse. There are good, saved Christians on both sides of the debate.
    - i) One view (with many variations) is this refers to the “Great Tribulation”. We will spend a lot more time discussing this in future lessons of Revelation. The basic idea is there is a special 7-year "tribulation" time span, described in Revelation Chapters 4-19. During this period, God judges and punishes nonbelievers. Verse 10 calls it “an hour”. Even today we still use that expression “the hour” to mean a specific time period, but not necessarily just one hour.
      - a) Jesus promises the Philadelphia Christians exemption. The idea is that they are taken off the earth prior to all of this started. This is where the concept of the “rapture” comes from. That word rapture is not in the bible as it comes from the Latin, and not the Greek language.
      - ii) The alternate view is it refers some other form of persecution. Some argue it refers to the great persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire on and off over the next several centuries. Some argue it refers to salvation versus condemnation.
      - iii) Those who argue for the rapture prior to the tribulation point out the literalness of a world-wide judgment. The emphasis is on the phrase, “whole world”.
      - iv) The counterargument is the Philadelphia Christians of the first century are now long-dead from our time perspective and never experienced the rapture.
      - v) Both sides have some valid points. Personally, I believe strongly in the "rapture" argument. I'll discuss this further in further lessons.
14. Verse 11: I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.
- a) The NIV translation of the bible misses a word at the beginning of the sentence. The King James Version (and others) say, “Behold... I am coming quickly”. The idea is to be on the lookout for Jesus.
  - b) The bible teaches Jesus can return at any moment. It has now been roughly 2,000 years and counting. God designed it this way to keep us on our toes. Think of it this way: we have no idea how long we have to live. Any moment we could die or any moment Jesus could come back. Since we don’t know how much time we have, the goal is to be as effective as we can for Jesus in the time given to us. God does not measure us based on how much time we have, but what we did with the time given us.
    - i) The idea of “I am coming soon” is that Jesus return is to be unexpectedly. Most people don’t know the moment of our death and no one knows the moment of Jesus’ return. It will come unexpectedly.
  - c) This leads to the main point of this verse: “Hold on to what you have”. The idea ties to the last verse of not denying Jesus in the face of persecution, or compromise or whatever.
  - d) The last part of the verse mentions “crown”. Our crown is not so like the crown of a king, but more like a “victory crown”. It is another way to state the promise of salvation.
15. Verse 12: Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.<sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- a) Verse 12 continues the idea of salvation-as-a-reward for believers. Remember that the term “overcome” is used by the writer of Revelation (John) to mean salvation in 1<sup>st</sup> John:
    - i) “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” (1<sup>st</sup> John 5:4, NIV)
    - ii) What are we overcoming? The temptation to deny Jesus as Lord in the face of persecution or temptation or compromise.

- b) With that understood, Verse 12 says that the “overcomer” will be made a “pillar in the temple of My God”.
    - i) This does not mean Christians are turned into cement pillars. ☺ There is a bible word-picture concept that all Christians together “form a temple”. The idea is the “temple” of God is made up of Christians. It’s a picture of group effort: We are to work together to draw upon God’s strength and then strengthen each other.
    - ii) With such power, we are like “pillars” in a large temple structure.
    - iii) Most Christians are familiar with the idiom, “Body of Christ”. It comes from the same word-picture how all Christians form a single entity.
  - c) The next phrase is “Never again will he leave it”. A ticket to heaven is a one way ticket. One cannot get kicked out once one is in heaven.
  - d) Jesus then says, “I will write on him the name of my God”. The idea is that we are saved as a reward for fully trusting in Him. Cowboys permanently brand cattle to identify the animal as one of theirs. That brand mark cannot be removed. The word-picture of "write on him" is Christians get some sort of “brand-mark” identifying us with Christ. Only with us, the branding won’t hurt. ☺ How literally we take branding is speculation.
  - e) When we get to Revelation 21, there is a reference to a “New Jerusalem” that comes down from heaven. It is another reference to all Christians as a collective, single entity.
    - i) Every now and then I’ve mentioned that the bible is nicknamed “The tale of two cities”, with one being Babylon and the other being Jerusalem. The idea of Babylon represents all who choose to rebel against God and choose their own path. Jerusalem represents the capital of those who choose to follow God. Still, the “old” Jerusalem has all of us imperfect (sinful) people. The “New Jerusalem” represents all believers washed of all sins.
  - f) The final part of Verse 13 says, “I will also write on him my new name”.
    - i) This is the second mention in Revelation of the fact that Christians get a new name. (See also Revelation 2:17). In Chapter 2, God says He has some new name for each of us that is unknown to us at that time. This reference is similar here in Verse 13. It could also refer to some new name Jesus is “branded” on us.
  - g) Let’s step back for a second: Why state all of this reward stuff?
    - i) First, put yourself in the context of someone in that church in Philadelphia. Imagine it was a death sentence to be caught going to church! You would want to know that this risk is worth the reward.
    - ii) All Christians go through periods of doubts. All of us, even when we are not going through tough times, wonder if living this lifestyle is worth it. Reading verses like these remind us to keep our eyes focus on the goal of living for Jesus, every moment of every day. It is all or nothing!
  - h) The final verse to the Philadelphia church is the “he who has an ear” reference. Again, the idea is for all Christians to learn what is written to this church. The same principals of rewards for the “overcomer” apply to all Christians.
16. Verse 14: "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
- a) Congratulations everyone, we made it to the final letter. ☺ If you’ve made it this far, you can handle all of Revelation!
  - b) The word Laodicea means “Justice (judgment) of the people”. Jesus comes down hard on this church and there is a “pun” in the church name and the judgment on this church.
  - c) Laodicea was a wealthy city in Asia Minor. It was a banking center, an exporter of wool and it was known as a medicine center, particularly for an eye salve solution to help stop eye infections. Its sole water source was miles away. The city could be easily conquered by stopping the water flow. Laodicea was also known for compromising with potential conquerors in order to avoid conquest of its city. With its riches, Laodicea could buy its way of out trouble. All of this background is helpful to upcoming verses.

17. Verse 14, second sentence: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.
- a) These are all titles of Jesus that speaks of His "preeminence" over creation.
  - b) Let's start with "Amen". The word "amen" means, "so be it". We use it at the end of prayers to state our agreement with that prayer. That word is also translated "verily" (KJV) and "assuredly" (NKJV). The idea is we can count on Jesus' words as being truth.
  - c) Next comes, "The faithful and true witness". One of the 12 apostles (Phillip) once asked Jesus if He could show them God the Father. Jesus responded with "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). The idea is that everything we need to know about the nature of God the Father is revealed in Jesus. He was the "true witness".
  - d) The final phrase is the "ruler" of God's creation. The King James says "beginning", but the word "ruler" gets the idea across better. The idea is Jesus is preeminent over creation and not a part of creation.
  - e) Tying this altogether, Jesus is about to come down hard on the Christians in Laodicea. Before He can do that, it was important to state His authority to do so. This heavy handed judgment includes eternal condemnation of many who claim they are believers. In order to punish such people, it is important to state His authority to give such judgment. Remember the word Laodicea means "judgment on the people".
18. Verse 15: I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
- a) Jesus has nothing good to say about the Laodicea church. Remember that this was a rich city. I'm speculating the Christians of that town were relatively wealthy. The main point Jesus is making is because they trusted in their wealth, they were not fully trusting in Jesus. Remember that Christianity is an all or nothing deal! Jesus compares this church to being "lukewarm". They are neither on fire for Jesus (hot) or negative about Jesus (cold).
    - i) There is a "pun" here in that the Laodicean water came from hot springs miles away. By the time it got to town via the aqueducts, the water was lukewarm. The pun is their faith in God was as lukewarm as their drinking water.
  - b) What is interesting is that Jesus says He wishes the church was either "hot or cold". You would think that a "lukewarm" Christian is a preferential choice over someone who is "cold" toward Christianity. Jesus says the opposite is true.
    - i) I am convinced there are going to be multitudes of people not going to heaven because they have a "little bit of religion" in their system. The danger of being "lukewarm" for Jesus is one does not have that "all or nothing" commitment.
    - ii) One of the scariest lines in the gospel is when Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:22-23 NIV).
    - iii) To "know" Jesus has nothing to do with just calling Him "Lord" and then never acting on that knowledge. One could even perform miracles in "Jesus name", but if one never obeys Jesus commandments, one is not saved. One is saved by faith alone. The evidence of that faith is we act on that knowledge. Again, it is an all or nothing deal! One can half-heartedly claim to know Jesus and not commit ones life to Him. That is what Jesus is condemning by "being neither cold nor hot".
  - c) As I've stated, each of the seven churches is clueless about their condition. This is true of the church in Laodicea. Verse 17 states that they are financially rich and this was true. Jesus then calls them "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked". Not good. ☺

- d) Ok, we get the idea that Laodicea depended upon their wealth and not God, and they are in big trouble. What's the application to us?
- i) Remember the overriding theme of all seven letters is how Christians are to be effective witnesses for Jesus. The danger is not money in itself. The danger is dependence upon money for one's Christian life. The danger is the desire for money over the desire for God.
  - ii) Queen Elizabeth of England once said, "She was saved by the letter m". First Corinthians 1:26 says, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (NKJV)
    - a) My point here is that having money is not a ticket to hell. The danger is to trust in one's wealth as a sense of security and salvation.
  - iii) Satan gets some to compromise by persecution. I'm convinced Satan gets far more people to compromise their faith by their dependence upon material things.
  - iv) Don't get me wrong: If you have the money say, to get the best medical help possible in times of sickness, go do it. There is nothing wrong with that. The point is to thank God that He made the resources available so that you or I could get the best medical help possible. The key is to comprehend that our dependence ultimately comes from God, and not from whatever resources we have on hand.
- e) A good spiritual barometer test every now and then is to say, "I am trusting in God and what". The "what" could be a danger that draws us away from God. Pray to God to show us the "what" of our lives. It may hurt in the short run, but in the end, it will draw us closer to God and make us more effective Christians.
19. OK, time for a quick break to discuss the theory of "Each of the seven churches represents a different time era of the Christian history".
- a) The first of the three churches discussed in this lesson was the church in Sardis. The theory goes that this church represented the Reformation, when all the denominations other than Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox were formed. The argument goes they were correct to break away from the Catholics who were very corrupt during the Middle Ages. They also became stuck in their own denominational views to the point where their church was "dead" like the Sardis church. It also represents individual denominational churches today that are proud of their "glorious past", but are no longer effective witnesses for Jesus.
  - b) The second of the 3 churches in this lesson was Philadelphia. It represented the great wave of evangelism that started in the 1800's. Obviously this is the bias view held by non-denominational Evangelical Christians! ☺ This was a period where the bible became the sole source of doctrine and not church tradition.
  - c) The third church at Laodicea represents the "modern" church where one compromises with the bible truth in order to have socially accepted views. They compromise with what the bible teaches in order to be accepted by non-Christians. I suspect the church in Laodicea was well liked and well respected by non-Christians. There is no mention of any persecution of this church. The same applies today to churches that focus more on politics or social issues than they do what the bible teaches. They may do good deeds and be respected in the community, but at the same time ignore fundamental biblical truths.
  - d) Going back to the middle of Chapter 2, from the fourth church to the seventh church, the letter ends with the "He who has an ear" reference. In the first three letters, the same "ear" reference is prior to the end of the letter. Given that fact, many speculate the last four churches will be around until Jesus Second Coming. (The fourth one represents the traditional Roman Catholic Church. Numbers #5-#7 are the three discussed in the last three paragraphs). The first three churches represent "Long gone church eras".
  - e) There, now you have the theory. Enjoy it. ☺ Time to move on and finish the text.

20. Verse 18: I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.
- You get the impression the “Christians” in Laodicea were unsaved. Remember Jesus said He would “spit (vomit-KJV) them out of His mouth”. I’m not sure what that literally means, but it does not sound good. ☺ It could simply mean they lose their effectiveness as a church. More likely, it is a warning of eternal condemnation.
  - This is another reason why I call this lesson “all or nothing”. Calling oneself a Christian and then never depending upon Jesus (but upon their money) is a road to hell. That is the warning against the church of Laodicea and a warning to us.
  - Notice the “word puns” of this church. Jesus called them poor in Verse 17 even though they are financially rich. Jesus says they need to repent in order to become rich. This shows that being spiritually rich has nothing to do with one’s material wealth. Again, the danger is to depend upon material things, not to have them in the first place.
  - If you recall, one of the famous exported goods from Laodicea is a solvent for eye disease. Notice Jesus picks on that fact and says, “(put) salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” The idea is again, not to trust in the wealth of that city, but in Jesus alone.
21. Verse 19: Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.
- In context, this verse appears to be talking to non-believers who claim they are Christians. One has to understand that God loves all people, not just believers. At the same time, love cannot be forced on people. He gives us the free-will to choose Him or not choose Him. One way God works on nonbelievers is to “rebuke and discipline”. The idea is that God’s truth convicts our hearts that it “is” truth. God also allows negative circumstances in people’s lives to get those people to turn to Him.
  - Out of context, the principal of this verse can also be applied to believers. Anyone who has been a Christian for some time can attest to the line, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”. God loves us too much to leave us alone. Using the analogy I used earlier in the lesson, God “lets go of the handlebars” so we can grow in our faith in Him.
22. Verse 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 him, and he with me.
- Here is one of the most famous verses in the bible. It’s memorization time! ☺
  - This verse is commonly used in Evangelistic rallies and altar calls. The verse is using a word picture of a door between salvation and life on earth. Jesus is on the "outside" knocking to come in. The call is to any and all unsaved person that if they hear Jesus knocking and invite Jesus in, then Jesus will come and eat with him and dine with him.
  - Note that in this culture, to eat with someone means you dip in the same sauces and share the same germs, so to speak. You become "one with them".
  - Notice Jesus doesn't say, "I'm breaking the door down to let myself in". One can see the free-will aspect of salvation built into this verse.
  - Notice there is no limitation to this invitation. Jesus never says, "I will come in, unless of course, your house is a filthy mess from too much sin". The only limitation is what we set ourselves before Jesus.
  - To understand our relationship with Jesus, one has to have a balance of both Jesus as God and Lord of our lives; and at the same time understand He wants to be our personal, close and intimate friend. One must comprehend both aspects in our relationship with Him. This verse emphasizes the personal relationship aspect. Other parts of the bible emphasize Jesus as the Lord of our lives, from whom we take commands.

23. Verse 21: To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.
- a) Remember the word "overcomes" ties to salvation (See 1st John 4:4). Understanding that, Verses 18 through 21 are addressed to the unbeliever. Although it is not bluntly stated, one gets the impression most or all members of the Laodicean church are not saved.
  - b) Two churches ago, we had a church that was "alive but dead". Here we seem to have a church that thinks they are alive, but are not even saved. I'm speculating the key difference between the Sardis (alive but dead) church versus the Laodicea church is that the Sardis church consists of saved souls, but the church is ineffective as a witness for Jesus. This church in Laodicea thinks they are effective, but they are not even saved.
24. Verse 22: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- a) I've already discussed this "ears" reference to death so I won't say any more.
  - b) Notice that the last few verses end with a call to salvation to the unsaved. Even with all the positive and negative things said to believers, you get the impression God never gives up reaching out to unbelievers!
25. OK, time to wrap up the seven letters:
- a) I consider Chapters 2-3 the most important chapters in the book. From Chapter 4 onward, we get to specific future events about God judging the world and are next life in heaven. These other chapters are important, but they are prophetic and more speculative. Chapters 2-3 represent the here and now.
  - b) My final recommendation is to take inventory of oneself and one's church and say, "Am I being an effective witness for Christ? Is my church being an effective witness for Christ? Using the standards set in these seven letters, how do I, or my church stack up? Pray about this. Then ask what can I do to improve things? The answers are in the statements made by Jesus in these two chapters. Pray to God for guidance how to be more effective.
26. Let's go back to my title for this lesson: All or nothing.
- a) After studying all seven letters, you get the impression Jesus either wants us to be completely effective witnesses for Him, or don't bother in the first place. As I've stated, it is not about being obsessive about God around the clock. God understands we need time for work, family and rest. At the same time, God wants to be "Number 1 on a list of 1". That means everything we do should have some impact for Jesus.
    - i) Do you work for a living? Then work within the standards that the bible teaches us to live. Are you a student? Study and prepare within the guidelines that God teaches us? Is God opening an opportunity door for you? Then go for that opportunity with your utmost.
    - ii) How do I know if I am being effective? There is no perfect answer, but there are clues. You can look at results of one's efforts. You can see if there is any spiritual resistance. Are you using whatever gifts God has given you for His glory?
    - iii) Remember that we will all be judged one day the same way these churches are judged. We will also be judged individually based on what talents and opportunities are laid before us. Remember eternity is a lot longer than this lifetime. There is no greater joy, no greater sense of fulfillment than working for eternal rewards than the goals of this lifetime. At the same time, our motivation needs to be love for God, love for the fellow Christian and love for the unsaved. If you seek that, the rewards will take care of themselves.
27. Let's pray: Father, thank you for these lessons on being an effective witness for You. Let not these lessons be wasted. Show us the areas of our life that have not been turned over to You and help us to change those areas for the better. Help our churches be shining lights for You to each other and those in our surrounding community. Help us to use the precious time given to us to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.