

St. Matthew's Church
Thursday Night Bible Study
Revelation
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Session V | 25 October 2018 | The Letters to the Seven Churches (Continued)

- I. The Rebukes and Exhortations to the Churches
 - A. *Ephesus*: Orthodox but has lost its first love
 - B. *Smyrna*: Poor but rich--more tribulation to come.
 - C. *Pergamum*: Followed the doctrine of Balaam/tolerant of idolatry
 - D. *Thyatira*: "Jezebel" and her idolatries/immorality are tolerated
 - E. *Sardis*: Reputed for their life, but they are, in fact, dead
 - F. *Philadelphia*: Faithful and patient in the face of accusation
 - G. *Laodicea*: Neither hot or cold but useless--about to be rejected

- II. Textual Notes: Chapter 3 (Continued)
 - A. The Church at Philadelphia
 1. Verse 7: "the key of David" probably a reference to Isaiah 22:22, combined with the "holy" title given in Isaiah 3:9 and also a hearkening back to 1:18 with Christ as the One with the keys.
 2. "I know your works." Repeated anthem of the letters. Suggests familiarity and intimacy but also expectation and judgment.
 3. "They will bow down..." This is an interesting reversal of the prophecies in Isaiah 45:14, 49:23 and 60:1-14 in which the Gentiles are depicted as coming to bow to Israel as a sign of turning back to God. This use in Revelation indicates the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah and indicates that the vocation of the Church is now where the messianic promises reside. It also presents a true shock in the overall scope of the Bible, as the punishment that should have fallen on the pagans will now fall also on God's own people who rejected His Messiah.
 4. The contrast of "synagogue" with "Temple" here suggests the impoverished state of the present Jewish system in contrast with Christian faithfulness. Those in the Church of Philadelphia are in continuity with that Temple whereas the synagogue image is seen in continuity with Satan. Consider the discourse in John 8 and the resonance of the imagery that Christ uses there with the imagery here.
 5. The door that He opens and shuts thence takes on the meaning of exile. Christ reassures those faithful to Him in that, although they might be

exiled from their synagogue, that the door to the community of His faithful people is opened and closed only by Him. This is a message of hope in the midst of the pain of alienation for the sake of Christ.

6. Christ will “keep them” from the testing... is perhaps a reference to John 17:15. This does not mean a pass on suffering. Rather, it means that faithfulness to the kingdom produces a fortitude through suffering rather than an escape from it. Given what we will see of the symbolism of Christ Himself later in the book, as the One who appears “as a lamb that had been slain,” this seems to be the more plausible interpretation.
7. “Those who dwell on the earth...” this is a phrase that is particular in Revelation to reference those who are associated with idolatry. See also: (6:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8, 14:6, 17:2). Revelation seems to consider the faithful to be those who already share in life with God in his heavenly Temple. Those “who dwell on the earth” are seen in the imagery of being bound to the earth.

B. The Church at Laodicea

1. “Neither hot nor cold.” Ok, a geography lesson: So Laodicea was situated in Asia Minor between two cities, Colossae and Hierapolis. Colossae was in possession of a source of cold water. Hierapolis was in possession of a source of hot spring water. Laodicea needed to import water because they were without a source for themselves. The “lukewarm” water, along these lines, may refer to the fact that while cold and hot water had specific, salutary uses, lukewarm water was disdained in the ancient world for its susceptibility in playing host to parasites and bacteria.
2. “You claim to be rich...but you are poor.” This suggests that their self-identification is completely wrong, in fact antithetical to the truth of their condition. This is an inversion of the description of Smyrna in 2:9.
3. “Blind, naked, poor.” There was a famous school of ophthalmology in Laodicea, as well as a booming textile trade and a notable banking center. This might be helpful in seeing Christ’s irony in giving them this description. In short: their resources, though numerous, are seen as nothing in the eyes of Christ.
4. The remedy for this is to receive from Christ “gold purified in fire, (symbolizing perseverance)” “white garments (symbolizing righteousness)” and “eye-salve” to cure their blindness.
5. “Shame of nakedness” is an often-used phrase to describe the shame that comes through idolatry (Isaiah 47:3, Ezekiel 16:36, 23:29, Nahum 3:5) typically for Israel but also for other nations.

6. “Behold I stand at the door...” a possible reference to Song of Solomon 5:2. The Bridegroom stands beckoning to the Bride to welcome him into her room. There is a hesitancy in that narrative. The implication here is that opening the door will usher in communion with the Bridegroom.