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A Tale of Two Churches

Revelation 3:7-22

Prayer: *Father, I just again I thank you for who you are, I thank you for the gift that you've given to us of this place. Again each week we thank you for the gift of your Spirit and your word, and Lord, this is the time when we unpack that gift. And so I pray for the grace, the strength, the insight and the wisdom that only your Holy Spirit can provide as we do just that. And I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, I've entitled today's message a tale of two churches because these last two churches that Jesus is examining, they are complete polar opposites. And Jesus would know, I mean, as we come to the end of this part of Revelation where Jesus is critiquing his churches, we find one statement that Jesus makes over and over again. It's the one statement you can see repeated seven different times in all seven of the discussions of each of these churches and seven different times Jesus says, "I know your works." Over and over again Jesus points out how intimately he knows exactly what's going on in the trenches of his churches. He knows the

geographical settings, he knows the history, he knows the people and almost as if he's been watching over them all the time which is exactly what he's been doing.

We've seen him call out the church of Ephesus for its coolness, having forgotten its first love; we've seen him sympathize with Smyrna's persecution while he warns Pergamum and Thyatira about the false teaching that they're following. Sardis we just saw last week he proclaims is dead but then he gives them a way to come back to life.

Well this morning we're going to be looking at the very last of the two churches, these very last of the seven churches and really it's the very best one that Jesus encountered, that's Philadelphia, and it's the very worst one as well, that's Laodicea. So first we're going to looking at Philadelphia. This is *Revelation 3:7*. It says: *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true.'"*

Well Jesus describes himself as holy and true. This is something that only God can claim, something even demons acknowledge. If you remember at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the gospel of Mark he encounters a man with multiple demons and upon casting the demons out, they say: *"Let us alone! What have we to do with You,*

Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" Well Jesus goes on to quote from Isaiah a statement about his authority as well, and he describes himself as: *"HE WHO HAS THE KEY OF DAVID, HE WHO OPENS AND NO ONE SHUTS, AND SHUTS AND NO ONE OPENS"*. He goes on to say: *"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."*

So right off the bat Jesus makes it clear that it's he who opens doors and he who shuts them, and that has an awful lot to do with how we present the gospel. You see, when a door swings open we press in; and when it does not, we just keep on praying for an opening. We don't have the power; God does. And what Jesus says next should be an encouragement for every church that doesn't make the grade when it comes to power and might. He says, *"You have a little strength."* Well, you've got to understand, this is the church that's received the highest praise of all. This is a church with no power at all. Jesus knew that even though they had little strength they stayed true to God's word and they refused to deny him as Lord. So what Jesus is really commending in the church at Philadelphia is that they all had a heart for the gospel. They genuinely sought after opportunities to share the good news and because of that, they were on the look-out always for an open door,

because if you have an open door it's not going to change anything if you have no desire to go through it.

When Paul and Barnabas came to Antioch in the book of Acts they acknowledged that God had indeed opened that door to the Gentiles. *Acts 14* says: *Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.*

And so it raises the question, do you ever pray for an open door? You know, Paul and Barnabas had the wisdom and insight to sense and know an open door when it was presented to them and the question is do we? I say that because we're coming upon one of the few open doors that is presented to all of us simply by the calendar, and that open door is obviously Easter.

Okay. So how do you know if God is giving you a door to walk through with your friends and your relatives and your neighbors? How do you know? Well, the best thing to do is to just try the door. You know, if only a slight nudge makes it swing forward, you know one thing, God is beginning to present to you an open door. If you sense that it's locked and it's bolted, you know that he's not. Well, okay, how do you try a door? Well you just ask a bunch

of questions, simple questions. What are you doing for Easter? Hey, do you know what Easter is all about? Would you like to come to our church for our Good Friday service or our Easter service? Typical type of questions. They'll let you know whether that door is opened or starting to nudge a bit.

See, the Philadelphia church needed to know that it was God who opened and shut the doors because they often encountered nothing but hostility from their surroundings. And chief among their tormentors was once again the Jews, who just like in Smyrna, absolutely hated this new sect known as Christians for obvious reasons.

See, the Jews had carved out a unique relationship with Rome which gave them all the freedom they needed to worship as they saw fit while still enjoying the protection of living in a Roman culture. You have to remember at this time Christians were still thought of as a separate entity, as an abhorrent sect, an abhorrent part of Judaism. And thus the existing Jews saw Christians as a unique threat to their well-being as well as their relationship with Rome. And so it was the Jews who slandered and attacked the believers causing Jesus to identify them with their true God which he said was Satan. And again this isn't the first time that this happened. Some 60 years earlier when Jesus was ministering on earth he had

open confrontations with the Jews of his day and Jesus was a Jew but he labeled those Jews as belonging not to God but to Satan himself.

Jesus told these Jews in *John 8:44*: *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.* See, Jesus knew who belonged to him and who did not. He knew who were real Jews and who were not. You know, real Jews were Jews not externally but internally, as Paul put it, he says: *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*

We know time and again Jesus clashed with those who thought they were God's chosen people who had instead fallen in love with the law itself and not with the God that the law represented. So Jesus presented an immense threat to that law because he claimed he was the fulfillment of it. Jesus presented that threat because he represented a threat to their status quo. And because he represented a threat to that status quo, they went from passive to active opposition to actually plotting to take his life. And after Jesus had risen from the dead they made it their business to make life for Christians as difficult as they could. But understand

something, Jesus views the persecution of believers as a direct persecution of himself. And he promises in our text this morning that he's going to make these false Jews pay for their unbelief. This is what he says in verse 9. He said: *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.*

Next Jesus utters a statement that's more or less the very first round of the controversy that surrounds the whole book of Revelation. We're just starting to get into it now. And we're going to find out there's many different approaches to it. This is what Jesus says in verse 10. He says: *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.*

Okay. There's two critical points here. First of all, Jesus is referring to an hour of trial which is interpreted as a time of trial, a time of tribulation. And it's not localized; this is something that's going to affect the entire world. Secondly, the trial, the tribulation is directed at non-believers. The term that Jesus uses, he says -- quote -- *"those who dwell on the earth."* That's a technical term that refers specifically to unbelievers.

Revelation 6:10 says: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Revelation 13:8 says: All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Okay. So that's who we're talking about, the entire world of unbelievers. And this trial is referred to as a tribulation, again directed at unbelievers, those who dwell on the earth. Well the big question that everybody argues about is when? There are two specific mentions in scripture of an event that's going to take place some time during this trial, some time during this tribulation that the whole world is undergoing, and that event is referred to as the rapture. It's described in *Corinthians* this way: *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

Now it's described in even more detail in *1 Thessalonians 4*. It says: *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,*

with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Okay. So this much we know for certain. God is making a statement to his church in Philadelphia that we've seen, it's verse 10. He says: *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.* So we know a big trial is coming, we also know there's going to be a great event when the entire church is going to be caught up into heaven and the big question is once again when?

Well, folks are divided along three different lines when it comes to that question. There are those who are convinced that this trial's going to come only after God's people have been caught up into heaven and that's known as a pre-tribulation rapture because the church is taken up and removed before this great trial begins. There are those who believe that the rapture's going to take place in the middle of this great trial and guess what they're called. Mid-tribulation rapture folks. And then finally there's those who believe that the scripture's clearly saying the rapture of the

church is not going to take place until after this great trial and their position is known as post-tribulation rapture.

So again, this particular text that we're looking at, this is verse 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.* That text can be understood a number of different ways, none of which can be pinned down in a time frame as being pre, mid or post tribulation, which is right where I intend to leave it, for now. Jesus is simply telling us he's going to keep us from the hour of trial. And does that mean that we're going to suffer no consequences because God's taken us out of the world via the rapture or does it mean that God's going to give us the grace and the power to withstand those consequences as we remain in the world through the midpoint of the tribulation or even through the end of it, I have no idea.

This is what Jesus goes on to say. He says: *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 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.* "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to

the churches."

You see, here's the problem. So much of what Jesus is saying to the church at Philadelphia is particular to Philadelphians. You see, Jesus knows all the intimate details of the churches that he's commenting on and his comments really go directly to things that only the locals would know about. Darrell Johnson explains. He says this: "Philadelphia" -- now this is not the Philadelphia that we're talking about, this is ancient Philadelphia -- "was situated on the edge of an active volcanic area. This was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it meant access to rich, fertile soil and to hot springs. But on the other hand it meant constant danger from earthquakes. Tremors, strong and jolting, were frequent. Whenever a quake struck, the people of Philadelphia would flee the city. When the aftershocks subsided they would return. The people of Philadelphia were, therefore, 'always going out and coming in; they were always fleeing the city and returning to it.' Many people, out of fear, left the city every night! 'This frightened rhythm of flight and return had become part of their lives.' Jesus knows about life in Philadelphia and says to them: If you remain faithful to me you will enter the city of my God and 'will not go out from it anymore.' He is saying, I am your security, I am your unshakable foundation. In all your going and coming, your fleeing and returning, I remain the same. My presence with you is not

disturbed by geological or economic or political disorder."

(Johnson, Darrell W. *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (p. 107). Canadian Church Leaders Network. Kindle Edition.)

So again, this goes directly to that intimate knowledge that Jesus has about every aspect of the churches that he's commenting on. We saw he knew all about the coolness of Ephesus, he knew about the poverty and the tribulation of Smyrna, the false teaching of Pergamum and Thyatira, the deadness of Sardis and the love and joy in spite of the weakness and persecution of Philadelphia. So we take all of that into consideration, we ask the question, what are the chances that Jesus knows all about Grace Fellowship at 25 Sullivan Avenue, Port Jervis, New York? I think those chances are pretty good. I mean, we're certainly weak in terms of the political power like Philadelphia was, but the big question is, the question we need to ask ourselves is are we pleasing to God like they were? Because in the end, you see, that's the only thing that matters. Philadelphia didn't have any great statistical superiority over any of the other churches, I mean, what they had was really summed up in these three little statements that Jesus made at the very beginning. He says: *"You have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."*

Well, you know, having little strength may be the best thing that could have ever happened to Philadelphia. See, when you have no strength, when you have no strength on your own, you are forced to rely on the strength that only God can give you. So much of what the church is suffering from today I believe can be traced directly back to how wealthy we as a culture and country are. It is a simple fact that the more you have, the more self-sufficient you feel, the more self-sufficient you feel, the less you feel the need to rely on God. The less you need to rely on God the more God becomes simply an abstraction rather than a reality, and God knows that. God made that crystally clear way back in *Deuteronomy*. This is what he said. He said: *"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, 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, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."*

It's just a fact of life. If your answers to the struggles of life is not the God of the Bible but instead is MasterCard, VISA or Discovery, well, then forgetting God becomes a constant threat. Wealth makes it much harder to see God as anything other than

theoretical. I'm not saying that those tools are evil, I'm saying that having most of your physical needs met by a culture of abundance makes it much harder to see God as someone who exists on a level of practical necessity rather than theoretical, and I speak from experience.

Now I tell folks all the time, I say the most money I ever made when I was raising my family, one year or so we made close to \$30,000. I've been told over and over again you can't raise a family of twelve on that kind of money. You just can't do that. Well in fact we did, and God abundantly met our needs in a way that made us realize that he wasn't some kind of abstract theological concept but rather an actual real presence in our own life that got us through things that we never should have been able to get through. And none of those lessons were lost on my kids. I believe one of the reasons that most of my kids are still walking with the Lord is because they saw mom and dad unable to pay a bill, unable to do something on their own and more often than not they saw God provide a way when there was no way. I confess I chafed under much of that because I hated to be in a state of constant need, but it forced me to turn to the only one I knew who could get me through. I mean it's a heck of a lot more convenient having the money to pay for things but there's also a price to pay for that kind of affluence. You have to work at seeing God as a practical

reality. And if you don't work at it, God becomes way too theoretical, way too philosophical, way too theological.

So how do you work at it? Well, I think you actively seek to live as if you don't have much strength. How do you do that? Well, if you've been given a lot of money, try giving away enough of it to make you scared that you're losing your strength. Being in India where everybody had such little strength because they have so little material goods, it opened my eyes in ways that I could never have imagined. I mean I thought these people were cursed with unbelievable poverty but being around them and seeing the level of their faith and their trust even though they had very little strength, I saw that they had something that we couldn't even begin to approach and that it encompassed every aspect of their lives.

The Philadelphia church was blessed with very little strength as well but it forced them to focus on the one source of strength that makes a difference and that's God. In a word they demonstrated the one thing that matters to God and the one thing that encompasses every other thing that we do as believers and that's the word "faithful." They did nothing spectacular. They were simply faithful servants. You know, many of them heard what each of us long to hear when we die: *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.*

Enter into the joy of your master."

So Philadelphia succeeded in what matters most, in pleasing their Master. Laodicea, not so much. This is what Jesus said in Revelation 3:14. He said: *"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. I know your works: You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.'"*

Well Jesus starts out by declaring himself to be the amen. What he says is he's the living embodiment of what we mean when we say "amen" to a prayer. We say "amen" to a prayer, we mean to say "that's right," "that's true," "that's proper," "that's correct." Jesus represents every single thing about that. He's the way, the truth, and the life and so he's the essence of the faithful and true witness. And he says what should now sound very familiar, he says, *"I know your works."* And then what follows shows his extensive knowledge of Laodicea geographically, philosophically and spiritually, and unfortunately none of what he sees is good. So first is Jesus's knowledge of Laodicea's geography and that has to include a comment about its water supply which was famous.

Daniel Akin explains that Laodicea was a wealthy city with a terrible water supply. He says: "Despite its prosperity, the city did have one major weakness: An absence of an adequate and convenient source for good drinking water. By means of aqueducts, it got its water either from the hot springs of Hierapolis that cooled to lukewarm or from a cooler source in Colossae that warmed to lukewarm. For all its wealth the city had very poor drinking water. The water was so distasteful that visitors, not prepared for its tepid flavor, would often vomit after drinking it." (Johnson, *Revelation*, 1983, 62; also Swindoll, *Insights*, 78).

Well, the analogy perfectly fit the geography. Laodicea was theologically neither hot nor cold but indifferent, and the indifference is what Jesus hated. You know, I've had plenty of conversations with people who are passionate one way or another about the gospel. I've also had plenty of conversations with people who couldn't care less.

And just so we're on the same page, what I mean by the gospel is nicely encapsulated in four simple words in Greg Gilbert's little book *What is the Gospel*. I highly recommend it. If you need it, I can get one for you. The four little words that he states is: God, man, Christ, response. That's the whole gospel in those four words. Number one, there's a God, a God who's the creator of all

things, a God to whom all of us must give an account. The number two, there's man who was created in the image of God who rebelled when Adam and Eve defied God by eating the fruit and giving up their perfection. Says that all of us as fellow humans have inherited that same imperfection along with that same spirit of rebellion that puts us at enmity with our creator. And number three is Christ. Christ is God in the flesh who came down to earth to pay the price of our rebellion by living a perfect life, taking that perfect life to the cross, offering it as a substitute for our life of sin so that we by faith could put our trust in him. And finally, number four is our response. All of us at some point have got to respond to that story. That's the gospel: God, man, Christ, response. Some will be hot and accept it, some will be cold and reject it, but the vast majority will be just like the Laodiceans, they'll be absolutely and completely indifferent. Just like Jesus said: *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*

I've had lots of conversations with people who couldn't care less and I would far rather engage somebody who's passionately opposed to the gospel, at least we have a direction to go. We can isolate and find out those parts that this person finds most upsetting and address them. But when you come across somebody who thinks Jesus is cool, if you want to believe him, that's cool, that's fine;

you've got no place to go. There's no direction to head in except maybe to tell him or her that Jesus finds that kind of indifference sickening.

Jesus certainly knew individuals like Peter who were both, they were hot and cold, but that's okay. He also know folks like Judas whose main emotion was indifference. You know, Peter waxed hot when he told Jesus: *"Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"* He waxed cold when he told the crowd after Jesus' arrest, *"I don't know this man of whom you speak!"*

Judas was one neither hot nor cold but indifferent when he said this about Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet. He said: *"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* Well scripture itself tells us the extent of Judas' indifference. He says: *He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.* You see, Judas didn't care about the poor, he didn't care about the disciples, he didn't care about Jesus when he offered to sell him for 30 pieces of silver. Well, now imagine a whole church characterized by people with that whole level of indifference? You might think it's hard to imagine but if you think so, you're underestimating the power of incrementalism.

You see, Laodicea is the enemy's goal for every single church and he's got lots of different ways to get there. How many churches are passionate about everything but the gospel? Take the term "social gospel." I mean, social gospel was coined to describe churches who changed the gospel from "God, man, Christ, response," to instead focus on one aspect of the response to that gospel and that's man. These were churches who focused exclusively on the social needs of man to the exclusion of his spiritual needs. And no doubt those needs were of passionate concern to Jesus, I mean, things like feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and visiting those in prison were all part of what should be everyone's response to the gospel. We know Jesus cared so much about these issues that he described a great division that's going to take place on judgment day, and he spoke about the difference between sheep and goats.

This is what he said in *Matthew 25*. He said: *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the*

world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

You see, the sheep are the ones that were heading off into the kingdom. They were the folks who cared about feeding the hungry,

clothing the naked, visiting those in prison because they saw Christ in every one of them. As Jesus put it: *"As you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."* Well the goats on the left, they cared not a whit about them. They were completely indifferent to the suffering of those around them, and God said that indifference marked them out as goats rather than sheep. But understand what moved the sheep. It was a heart for Christ. It was the ability to see Christ in the least of them and that's the absolute opposite of indifference.

See, the social gospel twisted the real gospel into a social program. I mean, it placed the physical needs of people above their spiritual need for Christ and it demonstrated a profound indifference to what really matters eternally. It just points out how effectively the enemy can co-opt even churches for a false gospel. You see, what matters most to every person on this planet is not just food, clothing, and shelter but their relationship to Christ. The enemy co-opts that gospel by promoting a social gospel that addresses physical needs while ignoring the spiritual ones, and Laodicea became wealthy and powerful by doing just that.

But understand, the enemy doesn't stop there. Among us conservative evangelicals, he promotes a gospel that only addresses spiritual needs while ignoring the physical ones. I've said it

often: The enemy has a playbook for everyone, every person, every church, every situation. I think one of the great dangers of conservative evangelicalism is thinking that the only thing that matters is what you have in your head as opposed to what you have in your heart. The enemy loves both extremes because both of them deny the essence of the gospel and that's seeing Christ in the least of our brethren and wanting not only to meet their physical needs but even more importantly, their need for Christ. If you're not passionate for both body and soul, then you, too, qualify as lukewarm.

Jesus had much to say about churches that were lukewarm when it came to the gospel, even as they were able to accumulate power and wealth and there are lots of folks who like to point to the Roman Catholic church because it has both. I've got news for you, there's plenty of room for our Protestants in there as well. Today you find churches whose passion is about abortion rights or immigration or LBGTQ advances as much as you find great concerns about the social gospel and all of them profoundly miss the mark. When it comes to what Jesus really cared about, all of them qualify for Jesus' withering critique. This is what he said. He said: *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*

So what makes me think that Jesus isn't leveling this critique at us? Well there's one of those five categories that doesn't apply to us, and it makes all the difference in the world. See, I'd be the first one to say that all of us on our own are indeed, we are wretched, we are pitiable, we are poor and we are naked but one thing we are not is blind. We know we desperately need Christ. We know because without him we are all those things.

But here's the amazing thing about the grace of God. Jesus is addressing a church that in five different ways is wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked, and yet he offers them nothing but grace. Listen to what he says to them. He says: *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. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*

The gold that Jesus is offering is faith. It's the most precious commodity in the universe. Listen to how *1 Peter* describes it: *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith -- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and*

honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And the white garments that Jesus is offering those, that's the righteousness of Christ. Isaiah says: I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

And salve is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes. Listen to what Paul prays. He prays: *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. All of these treasures Jesus offers to a church that he finds vomitus. And finally Jesus says: "'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Now contrary to what a lot of people think, Jesus is not speaking to individuals here, he's speaking out -- standing outside knocking on the door of a church. He's speaking to people who profess to be*

believers and he's asking to be re-admitted to a church who has incrementally shut him out. To that extent, all of us are guilty. And what he's asking for, what he wants from each of us is a two-way relationship. He says: *"I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."* And what he offers us is to rule and reign with him forever. He says: *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.*

And what he never wants us to forget is that even though this has been a tale of two churches, one who seemed to do everything right and one who seemed to do everything wrong, both of them are so equally loved by Jesus who says: *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these seven churches that you have given to us, these seven different examples of the bride of Christ of something that was so precious to Christ that he went to the cross to redeem them. And Lord, they just stand as examples to us. They stand sometimes as what we should aim for, what we should avoid. And we find that specifically today in Philadelphia and Laodicea. Lord, I pray we could aim for Philadelphia, I pray we can avoid Laodicea and that you would give us the grace and the wisdom to do just that, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.