

Approximately 35 minutes Expository



## **Revelation 3 “Hear What the Spirit Says to the Churches”**

### **Opening Prayer:**

**Father God, we come before You in the mighty name of Jesus. We thank You for Your Word, and we thank You that Your Word is alive, sharp, and true. Lord God, as we open Revelation chapter 3, give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Help us understand these words historically, personally, and prophetically. Let the new believer understand clearly, and let the mature believer be stirred deeply. Show us Jesus in all His glory, authority, holiness, and love. Wake up sleepy hearts, strengthen faithful hearts, and**

**call lost hearts to salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.**








## **Historical Setting:**

The book of Revelation was given to the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. It was written during a time of real hardship, real persecution, and real spiritual battle.

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus speaks to seven literal churches in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. These were real congregations in real cities with real problems. But many Bible teachers who hold to a dispensational, pretribulation, premillennial view also see these churches as more than local assemblies. They also form a prophetic panorama of church history.

That means the seven churches are not only historical and personal. They are also representative. They picture spiritual conditions that unfold during the entire Church Age.

In Revelation 2 we looked at Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus**, Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh**, Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum**, and Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**. Now in Revelation 3 we come to the final three churches: Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh**. These are especially important because they bring us close to the end of the Church Age and point us toward the return of Christ.

These churches speak to three major conditions:

- a dead church,
- a faithful church,

- . and an apostate, lukewarm church.

And all three still exist in some form today.

## 1. Sardis ... The Dead Church with a Name:



(NIV)

**Revelation 3:1-6 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:**

**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. <sup>2</sup>Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, 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.**

***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. 5 The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. 6 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 1***

Jesus begins with Sardis in verses 1 through 6. He says something devastating:

**“...I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”** (v.1)

That is one of the most frightening statements a church could ever hear.

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<sup>1</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 3:1–6.

- Sardis had a name.
- Sardis had a reputation.
- Sardis had appearance.

From the outside, it may have looked impressive. But Jesus, who sees beneath the surface, says they were dead.

Notice that Jesus does not judge by image. He judges by reality.

A church can have a good sign, a full building, organized programs, polished language, and still be spiritually dead. A person can also have a Christian reputation, use Christian words, know Christian culture, and still not have real life in Christ.

Jesus tells Sardis to wake up and strengthen what remains. That means all was not gone, but the church was in serious danger. There were a few names in Sardis who had not soiled their clothes. So even in a dead church, Jesus knew His true people.

## **Sardis in a dispensational view**

In a prophetic, dispensational reading, Sardis is often seen as representing the church of the Reformation and post-Reformation era. The Reformation was a mighty work of God in many ways. It recovered great truths such as justification by faith and the authority of Scripture. We thank God for that.

But after the early fire of reform, much of Protestant movement hardened into formalism. In many places, truth was recovered in creed, but life was not always present in power. There was orthodoxy without energy, structure without spiritual life, reputation without revival.

That is Sardis.

This is a warning to all of us. It is possible to inherit a good statement of faith and still not walk in living fellowship with Christ. It is

possible to defend sound doctrine and yet be asleep spiritually.

Jesus says, “Wake up!”

That is a needed word today. Some churches are not under attack from persecution or compromise. They are under attack from deadness. Sleep. Ritual. Routine. Familiarity without fire.

The answer is not mere emotion. The answer is repentance and renewed dependence on Christ.

## **2. Philadelphia ... The Faithful Church with an Open Door:**



(NIV)

**Revelation 3:7-13 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:**

**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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.**

**<sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name. <sup>13</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. <sup>2</sup>**

Next comes Philadelphia in verses 7 through 13. This church receives no rebuke. Like Smyrna, it is one of the two churches with no condemnation from the Lord.

Jesus presents Himself here as the One who is holy and true, the One who holds the key of David, the One who opens and no one can shut, and shuts and no one can open.

That means Jesus is in full control. Not Rome. Not Caesar. Not false religion. Not the culture. Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 3:7-13.

Then He says:

**“...See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut...”** (v.8)

Philadelphia was not described as large or flashy. In fact, Jesus says, “You have little strength.” But they had something far more important: they had kept His Word and had not denied His name.

That is beautiful.

- You may feel weak.
- You may feel small.
- You may feel like you do not have much influence.

But if you hold fast to the Word of God and stay true to the name of Jesus, the Lord is pleased.

## **Philadelphia in a dispensational view**

In the prophetic outline of church history, Philadelphia is often seen as representing

the **missionary church**, the **revival church**, the **Bible-loving church**, the **evangelistic church**. Many place this especially in the era of great missionary expansion and Bible-centered awakenings.

This was not a perfect church because no church is perfect. But it was a faithful church. It loved the Word. It honored Christ. It walked through the open doors God set before it.

That makes Philadelphia especially precious to those who hold a pretribulation, premillennial view.

  Why?

Because in verse 10 Jesus says:

**“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.”** (v.10)

This verse is deeply important in pretribulation theology.

Notice carefully: Jesus does not merely say He will keep them through the trial. He says He will keep them **from the hour** of trial.

That language points not merely to protection in the middle of trouble, but exemption from a specific time period.

   And what is this time period?

It is a worldwide hour of trial coming upon the whole earth. That goes beyond ordinary persecution. That points forward to the future Tribulation period described in Revelation 6 through 19.

This fits beautifully with the pretribulation understanding: **the church is not appointed to the wrath of God.** The faithful bride of Christ will be caught up to meet the Lord before that hour falls on the whole world.

Now this does not mean Christians never suffer. We do suffer. We face trials, persecution, sorrow, loss, and spiritual warfare. In fact, researchers at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity have estimated that more than **70 million Christians** have been martyred over the last two thousand years, and that **more than half** of those deaths occurred in the **20th century** under systems such as fascism and communism. That means the last century has been one of the bloodiest centuries in church history.

And persecution has not disappeared. Open Doors reported in its 2026 World Watch List that **more than 388 million Christians** suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, and Pew Research Center reported that Christians were harassed by governments or social groups in **165 countries** in 2023.

👉 But the future Tribulation is something distinct. It is not simply man's hatred. It is the outpouring of divine judgment on a Christ-rejecting world.

So Philadelphia becomes a glorious picture of the true church that clings to Christ and His Word and is promised deliverance from that coming hour.

Then Jesus says, **"I am coming soon..."**<sup>(v.11)</sup> That is the language of nearness. The church is to live in expectancy.

- Not date-setting.
- Not fear.
- 👉 But expectancy.

We are not waiting for signs before we look for Jesus. We are looking for Jesus Himself.

### **3. Laodicea ... The Lukewarm Church of the Last Days:**



(NIV)

**Revelation 3:14-22**

**“To**

**the angel of the church in Laodicea**



**LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh write:**

**These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.***

***<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.***

***<sup>20</sup> 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 that person, and they with me.***

***<sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.***


***<sup>22</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>3</sup>***

Then we come to Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh**, perhaps the most sobering of all the churches.

Jesus identifies Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s

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<sup>3</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 3:14–22.


creation.” In other words, He is the final word, the trustworthy witness, and the sovereign Lord. That matters because Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** was full of self-deception.

Jesus says:


**“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!”** (v.15)

Then comes the famous statement:


**“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”** (v.16)

Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** was materially wealthy. They said, **“...I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing...”** (v.17) But Jesus says they were **“...wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked...”** (v.17)

That is one of the greatest dangers in the Christian world: self-satisfaction without spiritual reality.

Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** thought they were doing well. Jesus said they were spiritually bankrupt.

### **Laodicea in a dispensational view**

In the prophetic outline of church history, Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** is often seen as the final phase of the visible church on earth...the lukewarm, self-sufficient, compromised, last-days church.

This church is religious, but not surrendered.

- It is wealthy, but not rich toward God.
- It is confident, but blind.
- It talks about Jesus, but Jesus is outside the door.


That last picture is heartbreaking. In verse 20 Jesus says:

**“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock...”** (v.20)

This is often used evangelistically, and rightly so, but in context it is Jesus standing outside a church that has shut Him out.

Imagine that. A church with activity, religion, resources, and reputation...but Jesus is outside.

That is Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh.**

In a pretribulation, premillennial understanding, Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** represents the final condition of much of professing Christian beliefs just before the Lord comes for His church. It is the broad religious system that has outward form but little true power, much wealth but little holiness, much talk but little surrender.

   And that fits the last days.

The Bible says perilous times will come. Men will have a form of godliness but deny its power. That is Laodicean in spirit.

We are living in a time when churches can become consumer-driven, comfort-driven, entertainment-driven, and culturally shaped. Truth gets softened. Sin gets renamed. Repentance gets ignored. And people say, “We are doing great,” while Jesus says, “You do not see your true condition.”

But even here, grace shines.

Jesus counsels them to buy from Him gold refined in the fire, white clothes to wear, and salve for their eyes. In other words, true riches, true righteousness, and true spiritual sight are found only in Him.

Then Jesus says:

**“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”** (v.19)

Even Laodicea 🗣️ **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** gets a call to repent.

That is mercy.

#### **4. What These Churches Mean in Pretribulation, Premillennial Theology:**

So what do Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea 🗣️ **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** mean in a dispensational and pretribulation, premillennial framework?

They mean at least four things.


- **First, they were literal churches.**

These were real local congregations in John's day. We must never lose that.

- **Second, they are timeless church types.**

At any point in history, and even right now, you can find Sardis-like churches,

Philadelphia-like churches, and Laodicean  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** churches.

- **Third, they give a prophetic panorama of church history.**
- **Sardis** pictures the church with a name but little life, often associated with post-Reformation formalism.
- **Philadelphia** pictures the faithful, Bible-centered, missionary-hearted church.
- **Laodicea**  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh** pictures the lukewarm, self-satisfied, last-days church.
- **Fourth, they set the stage for what comes next.**




Revelation 1:19 gives the outline:

- “what you have seen” — chapter 1
- “what is now” — chapters 2 and 3
- “what will take place later” — chapter 4 onward

That is very important.


The church is prominently addressed in chapters 2 and 3. Then beginning in chapter 4, the scene shifts. The judgments of the Tribulation unfold. The church is not described there as on earth undergoing that wrath. Instead, the focus moves to the throne, heaven, Israel, the nations, and the judgments to come.

That is one reason pretribulation believers see Revelation 4 and following as future after the church age has run its course.

   So Revelation 3 is not just about ancient cities. It is about where we are living in **God's prophetic program**. It urges us to discern the times, cling to Christ, and keep watching.

## 5. The Message for Us Today:

What does Revelation 3 say to us personally?

- If you are in a Sardis condition, wake up.
- If you are walking in a Philadelphia spirit, hold fast. Keep His Word. Do not deny His name. Walk through the doors He opens.
- If you are drifting toward Laodicea  **LAY-oh-duh-SEE-uh**, repent quickly. Do not let comfort replace consecration. Do not let religion replace relationship. Do not let success replace surrender.

Jesus is not looking for polished appearance. He is looking for reality.

- He wants living faith.
- He wants loving obedience.
- He wants true fellowship.
- He wants hearts that belong fully to Him.

**Invitation to Be Born Again:**

Maybe you have listened to this message and realized that you have religion, but not reality. Maybe you know church, but you do not know Christ. Maybe you have a reputation, but no new birth. Maybe you are outwardly moral, but inwardly far from God.

Listen carefully: Jesus Christ is still calling.

- He died on the cross for your sins.
- He rose again from the grave.
- He is alive right now.



And He will save everyone who comes to Him by faith.

- You cannot save yourself by trying harder.
- You cannot wash away your sins by religion, good works, or church attendance.
- 🙌 You must be born again.

That means turning from sin and placing your trust in Jesus Christ alone as Savior and Lord.

If you have never done that, come to Him now.

- Call on Him.
- Ask Him to forgive you.
- Ask Him to save you.
- Ask Him to make you new. He will not turn away the one who comes with a sincere heart.

The Bible says in   (NIV) **Romans 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

If you want that today, pray from your heart:



Let us Pray

**“Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner.... I believe You are God in the flesh.... I believe You died for my sins and rose again.... Forgive me.... Cleanse me....**

**Give me a new heart..... I surrender to You.... Be my Lord and my Savior.... In Jesus' name, Amen.”**

If you prayed that sincerely, you are born again.

Welcome to the family of God!

👉 And believer, hear this also: do not become sleepy, lukewarm, or self-satisfied. Stay close to Jesus. Stay in His Word. Stay faithful. Stay watchful. The Bridegroom is coming.

 **Closing Prayer:**

**Lord Jesus, we thank You for Revelation chapter 3. Thank You for these warnings, these promises, and these invitations. Search our hearts. Wake up what is dead. Strengthen what remains. Keep us faithful to Your Word. Protect us from compromise, self-deception, and lukewarmness.**

**Make us like Philadelphia...humble,  
obedient, watchful, and true.**

**And Lord, for anyone hearing this who  
has never been born again, draw them to  
Yourself right now. Open blind eyes.  
Break hard hearts. Grant repentance and  
faith. Let them come to Jesus and be  
saved.**

**We thank You that You are holy, true,  
and coming soon. Keep us ready, keep  
us faithful, and keep our eyes on You. In  
Jesus' name, amen.**



Matthew 28:19-20