Revelation 3

Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea: I Stand at the Door

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

A good reputation can hide a dead heart, and a church that has everything can be missing Jesus Himself. But a weak church that keeps His word gets an open door no one can shut. To the dead He says wake up; to the faithful He says hold fast; to the comfortable He says open the door — I'm standing right here.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

REVELATION 3 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
⇄ Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning
★ Violet Promise / blessing
◷ Amber Time / place / contrast

1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; ⇄ I know thy works, that ⚠ thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

2 Green Be watchful, and Green strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and Green hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, ⚠ I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and ★ they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that ⇄ overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and ★ I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but ★ I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 ⇄ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith ▲ he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath ▲ the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8 ⇄ I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee ★ an open door, and no man can shut it: for ◷ thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that ▲ I have loved thee.

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will ★ keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 ◷ Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, ⚠ that no man take thy crown.

12 Him that ⇄ overcometh will I make ★ a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

13 ⇄ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, ▲ the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 ⇄ I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art ⚠ lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and ⚠ have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art ⚠ wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Marked in the text

- **v1** I know thy works *(every occurrence)*
- **v1** thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead
- **v2** Be watchful
- **v2** strengthen the things which remain
- **v3** hold fast, and repent
- **v3** I will come on thee as a thief
- **v4** they shall walk with me in white
- **v5** overcometh *(every occurrence)*
- **v5** I will not blot out his name out of the book of life
- **v5** I will confess his name before my Father
- **v6** He that hath an ear *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** he that is holy, he that is true
- **v7** the key of David
- **v8** an open door
- **v8** thou hast a little strength
- **v9** I have loved thee
- **v10** keep thee from the hour of temptation
- **v11** Behold, I come quickly
- **v11** that no man take thy crown
- **v12** a pillar in the temple of my God
- **v14** the faithful and true witness
- **v16** lukewarm
- **v17** have need of nothing
- **v17** wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked
- **v18** buy of me gold tried in the fire
- **v19** As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten
- **v20** I stand at the door, and knock
- **v21** to sit with me in my throne

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 3:5 (KJV)

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Setting

The last three letters from the risen Christ, to Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Same pattern as chapter 2: a title of Jesus, "I know your deeds," a verdict, a command, "He who has an ear," and a

promise "to him who overcomes." Two churches get almost nothing but rebuke (Sardis and Laodicea); one gets nothing but praise (Philadelphia).

Structure

- vv1–6 — **Sardis, the church with a reputation:** from "He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" (v1). "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (v1). "Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain" (v2). "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent" — or "I will come like a thief" (v3). A few "have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (v4). Promise: white garments, "I will not erase his name from the book of life," and "I will confess his name before My Father" (v5).
- vv7–13 — **Philadelphia, little power and an open door:** from "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v7). "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (v8). Their enemies will "know that I have loved you" (v9). "I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world" (v10). "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (v11). Promise: "a pillar in the temple of My God" and three names written on him (v12). No rebuke.
- vv14–22 — **Laodicea, lukewarm and self-satisfied:** from "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God" (v14). "You are neither cold nor hot" (v15) — "because you are lukewarm … I will spit you out of My mouth" (v16). They say "I am rich … and have need of nothing," not knowing they are "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (v17). "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire," white garments, and eye salve (v18). "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent" (v19). "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (v20). Promise: "to sit down with Me on My throne" (v21). No praise.

Repeated words

I know your deeds (vv1, 8, 15); overcomes (vv5, 12, 21); "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vv6, 13, 22); white (vv4, 5, 18); name (vv1, 5, 8, 12); repent (vv3, 19); door (vv8, 20); throne (v21, twice).

Contrasts

Sardis has "a name that you are alive" ⟷ "but you are dead" (v1). Philadelphia has "a little power" (v8) ⟷ an open door "which no one can shut" (v8). Laodicea says "I am rich" ⟷ Jesus says "poor and blind and naked" (v17). Cold or hot ⟷ lukewarm (vv15–16). Jesus shuts the door against no faithful church (v8) ⟷ Jesus stands outside the door of His own church (v20). Spit out of His mouth (v16) ⟷ seated on His throne (v21).

Chapter theme (my words)

A good reputation can hide a dead heart, and a church that has everything can be missing Jesus Himself. But a weak church that keeps His word gets an open door no one can shut. To the dead He says wake up; to the faithful He says hold fast; to the comfortable He says open the door — I'm standing right here.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 3:7 (KJV)

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith ▲ he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath ▲ the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

Sardis — asleep on the cliff (vv1–6)

Sardis was a wealthy old capital built on a high, steep hill that its people thought could not be taken. Twice it fell because no one was watching — Cyrus's soldiers climbed a hidden path, and later Antiochus did the same. Walvoord, in Guzik: "Sardis had twice before fallen because of overconfidence and failure to watch." So Jesus' first command is "Wake up." Guzik observes that Sardis faced no real struggle and drew no attack — dead churches don't draw the enemy's fire. Caird, in Guzik: "A perfect model of inoffensive Christianity." Coming "like a thief" means coming unannounced (Matt 24:42–44; 1 Thess 5:2–6). Yet even in Sardis Jesus counts "a few people" who are faithful — He never loses track of His own.

The book of life (v5)

Does "I will not erase his name" mean a believer's name can be erased? Christians differ. Many in the Reformed tradition read it as a promise stated in the negative — the overcomer is never erased. Arminian readers take the warning as a real possibility for one who finally turns away. Guzik stresses that the focus is assurance, not a book constantly being erased and rewritten, but he insists the warning must still be taken seriously, and points to men who appeared to be believers and later renounced the faith. Either way, the promise to the overcomer is sure, and Jesus Himself will confess his name before the Father (Matt 10:32).

Philadelphia — little power, open door (vv7–13)

Philadelphia sat on a gateway road and was shaken by frequent earthquakes; people fled the city and came back again and again. Jesus is "true" — *alēthinos*, genuine, the real thing. He has "the key of David," a picture drawn from Isaiah 22:22 of the steward who alone can open and shut the king's house. The open door is likely a door of opportunity for the gospel (1 Cor 16:9; Col 4:3), and perhaps also access to the kingdom for believers shut out of the local synagogue. Their strength was small, and Jesus doesn't scold them for it — they kept His word and didn't deny His name. Havner, in Guzik: "Samson had great ability but poor dependability."

"Keep you from the hour of testing" (v10)

This is the most debated verse in the chapter. "Those who dwell on the earth" is Revelation's phrase for unbelievers (6:10; 13:8; 17:8). Guzik, a pre-tribulation futurist, reads "keep you from" as protection *from* the hour itself — the rapture of the church before the tribulation (1 Thess 4:16–17; 5:9). Walvoord, in Guzik: the rapture "was presented to them as an imminent hope." Other believers read it as protection *through* the trial, kept from its spiritual harm (John 17:15 uses the same words, "keep them

from the evil one"). Those holding mid-, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation views, as well as amillennial and preterist readers, see it differently again. I'll hold my view with conviction and charity. The crown in v11 can't be stolen, but it can be forfeited — Havner: "the man most likely to steal your crown is yourself." And in an earthquake city, where often only pillars were left standing in the rubble, Jesus promises to make the overcomer "a pillar in the temple of My God," never to go out again.

Laodicea — lukewarm and blind (vv14–22)

Laodicea was rich and proud of it. After the earthquake of AD 60 it refused Rome's help — Tacitus, through Barclay in Guzik: it "arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources." It was famous for black wool and an eye salve, and its water came by aqueduct and arrived lukewarm. Jesus uses all three against them: buy white garments, buy real eye salve, and stop being lukewarm. The picture isn't that cold (hostile) is good; it is that hot water heals and cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water is useless and makes you gag. Guzik notes Jesus preferred cold to lukewarm; Barnhouse, in Guzik, explains that the very feeling of need might drive them to the true warmth. "The Beginning of the creation of God" uses *archē* — the source and ruler of creation (Col 1:15–18), not the first thing created. Their real problem was blindness: they didn't know they were poor. "Buy from Me" (Isa 55:1) means getting from Him what can't be earned. And "those whom I love" uses *phileō*, warm affection — the rebuke itself is love (Heb 12:6).

"I stand at the door and knock" (vv20–21)

These words were spoken to a church, not first to an unbeliever: Jesus is outside His own congregation, knocking. Guzik calls Laodicea "the church of the excluded Jesus." But the invitation is to individuals — "if anyone hears My voice." "Dine" is *deipneō*, the long evening meal of fellowship. To a lukewarm, self-satisfied church He offers the highest promise of all seven letters: to sit with Him on His throne. Clarke, in Guzik: "the worst may repent, finally conquer, and attain even to the highest state of glory." On the seven churches as stages of church history, Guzik grants the parallels but treats them as broad and overlapping; the letters belong first to real first-century churches, and every age has all seven kinds.

Word study (Greek)

- **wake up — *grēgoreō* (G1127):** to keep awake, be watchful.
- **soiled — *molynō* (G3435):** to stain, defile.
- **erase — *exaleiphō* (G1813):** to wipe out, blot out.
- **confess — *homologeō* (G3670):** to say the same thing, acknowledge openly.
- **true — *alēthinos* (G228):** genuine, real, the real thing.
- **key — *kleis* (G2807):** a key; authority to open and shut.
- **door — *thyra* (G2374):** a door, opening, opportunity.
- **testing — *peirasmos* (G3986):** trial, testing, temptation.
- **pillar — *stylos* (G4769):** a column, a support.
- **beginning — *archē* (G746):** origin, source, ruler.
- **lukewarm — *chliaros* (G5513):** tepid.
- **spit — *emeō* (G1692):** to vomit.

- **eye salve — *kollourion* (G2854):** a medicinal paste for the eyes.
- **love — *phileō* (G5368):** to love as a friend, with warm affection.
- **discipline — *paideuō* (G3811):** to train a child, correct.
- **be zealous — *zēloō* (G2206):** to burn with zeal; related to *zestos*, "hot" (v15).

Cross-references

Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:28; Isa 22:22; Isa 55:1; Isa 60:14; Hos 12:8; Matt 10:32; Matt 24:42–44; Luke 12:35–37; John 10:27–29; John 14:3; John 17:15; 1 Cor 16:9; Col 1:15–18; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 4:16–17; 1 Thess 5:2–9; Heb 12:5–11; Rev 16:15; Rev 20:12, 15; Rev 21:2.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 3:2 (KJV)

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Command to obey — "Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain."

Sardis didn't need a new program; it needed to wake up and guard what was still alive before it died too. I'll take honest stock today: what in my walk with Jesus is still breathing but weak — prayer, a friendship, a habit of the Word — and I'll strengthen it before it slips away.

Sin to confess — "I am rich … and have need of nothing."

Laodicea's sin was self-sufficiency, and it was blind to it. I'm good at building things and solving problems, and that can quietly become "I've got this." I confess the places I've stopped needing Jesus, and I ask Him for eye salve to see myself as He sees me.

Warning to heed — a name that you are alive

A reputation is not a pulse. People may think I'm doing well, and churches may look busy, while the life has gone out. And Jesus can be standing outside the door of a church that still uses His name. The warning is to stop managing appearances and let Him in.

Promise to trust — "an open door which no one can shut."

Philadelphia had only "a little power." That is good news for every man I disciple who feels he has nothing left — the man fresh out of prison with a record, the man in his first ninety days sober. Jesus holds the key of David. When He opens a door, no parole board, no past and no enemy can shut it. He doesn't ask for great strength; He asks us to keep His word and not deny His name.

Example to follow — the few in Sardis

In a dead church, "a few people … have not soiled their garments." They didn't need the whole church to be right in order to walk with Jesus in white. A man in a hard place — a cell block, a house where no

one else follows Christ — can be one of the few. I want to be one, and to stand beside the men who are.

Worship

He is holy and true. He is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the source of all creation. He holds the key of David and opens doors no one can shut. And He knocks, and waits, and promises a seat on His throne to anyone who opens. I worship the King who knocks.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, wake me up where I've been coasting on a name. Strip away my "I have need of nothing" and anoint my eyes to see. Thank You that a little power is enough when You open the door. Keep me holding fast what I have, so that no one takes my crown. I hear You knocking — come in and eat with me. And bring the men I love, who feel shut out and forgotten, through the door You have opened. Amen.